Weird Tales

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n You Guess is Man's Age?

f You Can Tell Within 25 Years; Author Couldn't; But He Stuck a Hobart Bradstreet Until He Re-ed His Method of Staying Young

:D to pride myself on guessing people's ages. .t was before I met Hobart Bradstreet, whose I missed by a quarter-century. But before you how old he really is, let me say this: meeting-up with Bradstreet I count the st day of my life. For while we often hear ur minds and bodies are about 50% efficient at times feel it to be the truth—he knows Furthermore, he knows how to overcome it ive minutes—and he showed me *how*.

s man offers no such bromides as setting-up ses, deep-breathing, or any of those things now at the outset you'll never do. He uses a ple that is the foundation of all chiropractic, pathy, mechano-therapy, and even osteop- Only he does not touch a hand to you; it necessary.

reader will grant Bradstreet's method of g young worth knowing and using, when he secret.

here is the secret: *he keeps his spine in trim.* man or woman who thinks spine motion t make a difference should try it! It is easy h. I'll tell you how. First, though, you may ious to learn why a healthy spine puts one entirely new class physically. The spinal n is a series of tiny bones, between which ids or cushions of cartilage. Nothing in the ry activities of us humans stretches the So it "settles" day by day, until those once nd resilient pads become thin as a safety-blade—and just about as hard. One's spine most wonderfully designed shock-absorber) is then an unyielding column that trans-very shock straight to the base of the brain. you wonder folks have backaches and head- ? That one's nerves pound toward the end hard day? Or that a nervous system may ically go to pieces? For every nerve in one's connects with the spine, which is a sort of switchboard. When the "insulation," or tge, wears-down and flattens-out, the nerves xposed, or even impinged—and there is e on the line.

, for proof that subluxation of the spine most of the ills and ailments which spell in men or women. Flex your spine—"shake "—and they will disappear. You'll feel the nce in *ten minutes*. At least, I did. It's no to secure complete spinal laxation as Brad- does it. But like everything else, one must how. No amount of violent exercise will do t even chopping wood. As for walking, or , your spine settles down a bit firmer with tep.

Bradstreet has evolved from his 25-year ex- ce with spinal mechanics a simple, boiled- ormula of just five movements. Neither takes than one minute, so it means but five minutes

But those movements! I never experienced ompound exhilaration before. I was a good t for the test, for I went into it with a dull che. At the end of the second movement I ht I could actually feel my blood circulating. ird movement in this remarkable SPINE-Mo- series brought an amazing feeling of ex- tion. One motion seemed to open and shut ckbone like a jack-knife.

ked about constipation. He gave me another n—a peculiar, writhing and twisting move- —and fifteen minutes later came a complete ation!

art Bradstreet frankly gives the full credit of nspicuous success to these simple secrets of OTION. He has traveled about for years, con- g those whose means permitted a specialist beck and call. I met him at the Roycroft East Aurora. But Bradstreet, young as he and feels, thinks he has chased around the

HOBART BRADSTREET, THE MAN WHO DEFIES AGE

country long enough. He has been prevailed upon to put his SPINE-MOTION method in form that makes it now generally available.

I know what these remarkable mechanics of the spine have done for me. I have checked up at least twenty-five other cases. With all sincerity I believe nothing in the whole realm of medicine or specialism can quicker remake, rejuvenate and restore one. I wish you could see Bradstreet himself. He is arrogantly healthy; he doesn't seem to have any nerves. Yet he puffs incessantly at a black cigar that would floor some men, drinks two cups of coffee at every meal, and I don't believe he averages seven hours sleep. It shows what a sound nerve-mechanism will do. He says a man's power can and should be unabated up to the age of 60, in every sense, and I have had some astonishing testimony on that score.

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Weird Tales

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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FANTAISIE d'ANTAN

by Clark Ashton Smith

Lost and alien lie the leas,
Purfled all with euphrasies,
Where the lunar unicorn
Breasts an amber-pouring morn
Risen from Hesperian seas
Of a main that has no bourn.
Only things impossible
There in deathless glamor dwell:
Pegasus and sagittary,
Trotting, part the ferns of faery;
Succubæ and seraphim
Tryst among the cedars dim;
Where the beaded waters brim,
White limoniads arise,
Interlacing arms and tresses
With the sun-dark satyresses;
There, on Aquilonian skies,
Gryphons, questing to and fro
For the gold of long ago,
Find at eve an aureate star
In the gulf crepuscular;
There the Hyperboreans,
Pale with wisdom more than man's,
Tell the wileful centauresses
Half their holocryptic lore;
There, at noon, the tritonesses,
All bemused with mandragore,
Mate with satyrs of the shore. . . .

Love, could we have only found
The forgotten road that runs
Under all the sunken suns
To that time-estrangèd ground,
Surely, love were proven there
More than long and lone despair;
Holden and felicitous,
Love were fortunate to us;
And we too might ever dwell,
Deathless and impossible,
In those amber-litten leas,
Circled all with euphrasies.

They Thought I Was A Weak Sister
-But I Took Their Breath Away!

ALL of a sudden the office was very quiet, as sometimes happens for an instant or two, and a few words reached me. "Oh, he won't dare kick," the manager was saying, "he's a pretty weak sister."

Mechanically I went on with my work, wondering vaguely who the weak sister could be. A new man had just been hired for our department and desks were being moved to make room for him. A minute later I looked up and saw the chief clerk standing at my side. "Bob," he crisply ordered, "move your desk back in that corner, I want this space for the new assistant I've hired." Then he turned and strode away.

I gulped and wilted down into my chair. *I* was the weak sister! And I was actually being demoted! The new man was being hired for *my* place! This was my reward for all my hard work—this was how I won out by waiting patiently for my turn to be promoted. I had even congratulated myself on my close-lipped, reserved manner—I thought I was showing strength of character by sticking to my work and not trying to push myself—to show off.

And that was the whole trouble. I had plenty of steel in my makeup, but I had no ability to express myself. I was timid, self-conscious, and actually afraid of my own voice. I would study out the office problems and find solutions for our difficulties, but I didn't know how to present these ideas to the man up ahead. Several of the boys who had started at the time I did were now department managers—because they had the knack of forceful speech, self-confidence and personality—the very qualities I lacked.

It made me good and mad—and I resolved to show them—to get rid, once and for all, of my timidity and shyness—my bashfulness and lack of poise.

In Fifteen Minutes a Day

And then suddenly I discovered a new easy method which made me into a good talker—a forceful and powerful speaker—almost overnight. I learned how to say just the right words at the right time, how to win and hold the attention of those around me, how to bend others to my will, how to dominate one man or an audience of thousands. My self-consciousness began to vanish. One morning I got up my courage and presented the manager and the chief clerks with a complete plan for rearranging our department—stating it simply and clearly, but in a pleasing, interesting and forceful way. I actually took their breath away—they were so amazed that they gave me full power to carry out my ideas!

Soon I had won salary increases, promotion, popularity, power. And I accomplished all this by developing the natural power of speech possessed by everyone, but cultivated by so few—by simply spending 15 minutes a day in the privacy of my own home on this most fascinating subject.

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THE EYRIE

THE pseudo-science of yesterday is the science of today. Scientific thought and conceptions of the universe are changing so rapidly that the science textbooks in the public schools lag far behind scientific discovery. The imaginative weird-scientific stories in WEIRD TALES are precursors of what scientific speculation may be twenty years from now. The swift-changing conceptions of the universe have fired the imaginations of that brilliant group of young writers who construct the fascinating weird-scientific stories in this magazine. The vast majority of our readers receive these stories enthusiastically; but a few of you complain that the stories of interstellar and interplanetary travels are so wildly fantastic and impossible that you can not enjoy them. Complaint is also made when our writers picture worlds ruled by strange monsters; for, you say, it is inconceivable that a world can be run by intelligent beings in the form of gigantic insects or even stranger monsters. We wish to call three books to the attention of these readers. Two of these books are by Charles Fort: *New Lands* and *The Book of the Damned.* In these books, although Fort does not prove incontestably that beings from other planets are actually visiting our earth, at least he piles up such a mass of evidence to support this proposition that the reader must admit its possibility. The third book, Maurice Maeterlinck's *La Vie des Termites* (now available in English translation under the title, *The Life of the White Ant),* shows that these creatures possess tremendous ability, scientific achievement, and constructive intelligence that would threaten the rule of man with overthrow except that the white ants are limited by climate. The manner in which they have solved scientific problems that have baffled man opens up a remarkable field for imaginative speculation.

"I have been a constant reader of your magazine for the last four years," writes Elmo James, of Fort Pierce, Florida, "and I take this opportunity of thanking you for making it possible. It provides a wonderful avenue upon which I ride away from the dull and drab things of everyday commonplaceness. I would be completely at a loss if I did not find a story of de Grandin by Quinn any more. It seems that I know him quite intimately. I also like

(Continued on page 728)

NEXT MONTH

An unusually great lineup of fine stories is scheduled for the January issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale December 1.

The Curse of the House of Phipps

By Seabury Quinn

Joshua Phipps buried alive beneath his hearthstone the girl who had loved him, and she put a terrible curse on him and his descendants—a fascinating story about Jules de Grandin.

The Bird-People

By Otis Adelbert Kline

The story of a weird country lying in a different angle of vibration from ours—something entirely new and surprizing in weird-scientific tales.

Dead Girl Finotte

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

A story of the West Indies, of Zombies, of dead men risen from the grave to become mindless slaves, of human robots, and weird Haitian magic.

The Murderer

By Murray Leinster

Terrible was the murderer's fright as he saw the murdered man move and sweep into his pocket the evidence that would condemn the criminal—a tale of stark terror by a popular author.

The Life-Masters

By Edmond Hamilton

Under the influence of the cosmic ray, great masses of protoplasm formed in the seas and advanced on the cities of Man.

The Net of Shamlegh

By Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner

A thrilling story of a gigantic spider—a tale of Thuggee and eery adventure in the hills of India.

The Red Fetish

By Frank Belknap Long, Jr.

A tale of weird adventure among savage head-hunters—the story of a red-headed man who ran afoul of cannibals.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the January issue of WEIRD TALES

January Issue on Sale December 1

Subscription Rates: $2.50 a year in U. S. or possessions; Canadian $3.00; Foreign $3.50.
WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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the stories by Eli Colter very much. I prefer stories of devil-worshipers and of reincarnations. I haven't noticed any stories of werewolves lately. What's the matter? Have some of your readers kicked on that type of story?"

"In your August number another masterful writer, Bassett Morgan, looms up as a dangerous rival to the great Lovecraft," writes E. L. Mengshoel, of Minneapolis. "His story, *Demon Doom of N'Yeng Sen,* holds the reader's attention in a real gorilla grip. But how shockingly cruel! But then, such bestialities perpetrated by so-called civilized beings on the poor savages are certainly not unheard of. However, Morgan's story is written in an unsurpassingly fascinating way from start to finish—even though one can not exactly relish such passages in it as must be real delicacies for certain readers with manifestly sadist tendencies (one of them even a woman) who have voiced their requirements in your magazine."

Mrs. M. Sherbank, of San Francisco, writes to the Eyrie: "Have just started reading your fascinating magazine and regret to think of all I've missed before. Really it is by far the best mystery magazine on the market—I'm sure any average human being would agree to that. I especially delight in the *Outside the Universe* type of story—it takes one so far away from daily troubles and routine for a while."

"If Robert E. Howard keeps up to the level he has set in *Skull-Face,* he will be hailed as the new Sax Rohmer," writes Ernest H. Ormsbee, of Selkirk, New York. "The story *is* a Sax Rohmer story. I had to turn back to the title-page when this installment was half read to convince myself that the Old Master of the Oriental tale had not returned to us. I thoroughly enjoy interplanetary romances, and you have given us several, but the stories that get my undivided support are stories like *Skull-Face*—Oriental guile and subtlety, fiendish cruelty of the (to us) twisted minds of the Mongol, Eastern cunning against Western aggressiveness."

Here is a suggestion from Gaylord Bell, of Mount Vernon, Washington: "I and many of my friends wish your publication would conduct a column wherein questions from the subscribers might be authoritatively answered. I am so full of such quizzes as: 'Do wolves really run in packs?'; 'What nationality is Bram Stoker?'; 'Are there any real proofs that once a continent Atlantis actually existed?'; and many others, that I feel certain this column would prove a popular success."

"Why have you eliminated torture tales entirely?" asks Albert James Cabral, of Provincetown, Massachusetts. "This is a great blow to this great magazine. That is what the cream of weird fiction consists of. The prince of modern story-writers deals with it in his famous novel, *The Hounds of God,* which tells about the Inquisition, the horror palace of Spain; yet you, dear friend, have taken torture tales out of your magazine. Please publish some more tales such as H. W. Munn's *The Chain*—a masterpiece of weird fiction.

(Continued on page 854)

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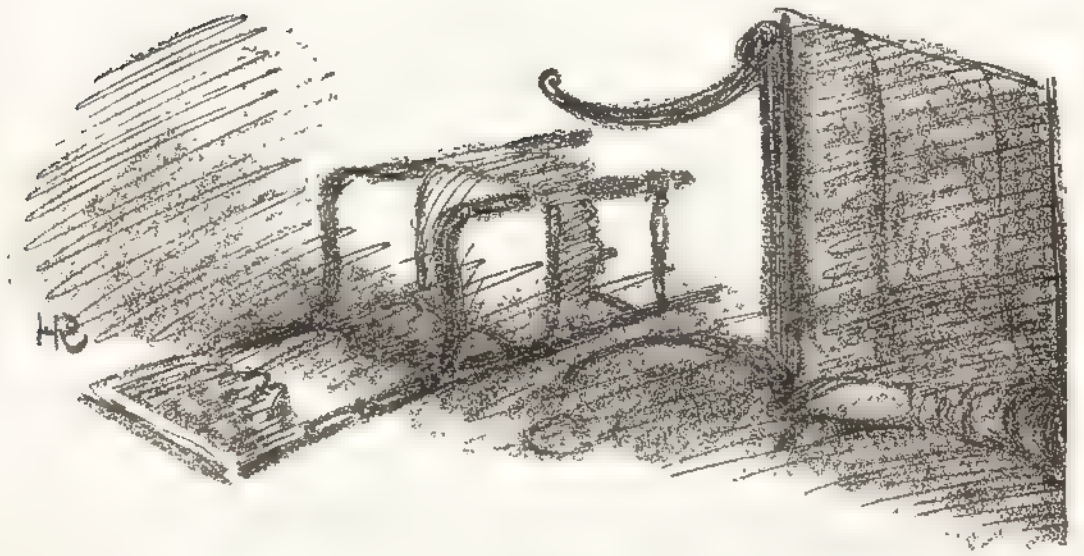
The Mystery

by GASTON LEROUX



THE old sea-dogs who spent their evenings seated on the terrace of the inn which overlooked the sea had never seen Zinzin arrive in such a condition before. His eyes were popping from his head, and he was as pale as death. As soon as he had had time to drop into a chair, they pressed anxiously around him.

"What is the matter, Zinzin? What is the matter, old fellow?" Captain Michel asked.

Zinzin made a sign that he was still unable to speak, but at last he wiped his forehead.

"I have just come from the police commissioner," he began, "and he gave me a most horrible bit of news."

"Tell us about it before it becomes old stuff," Gaubert exclaimed. "The story is sure to change with time."

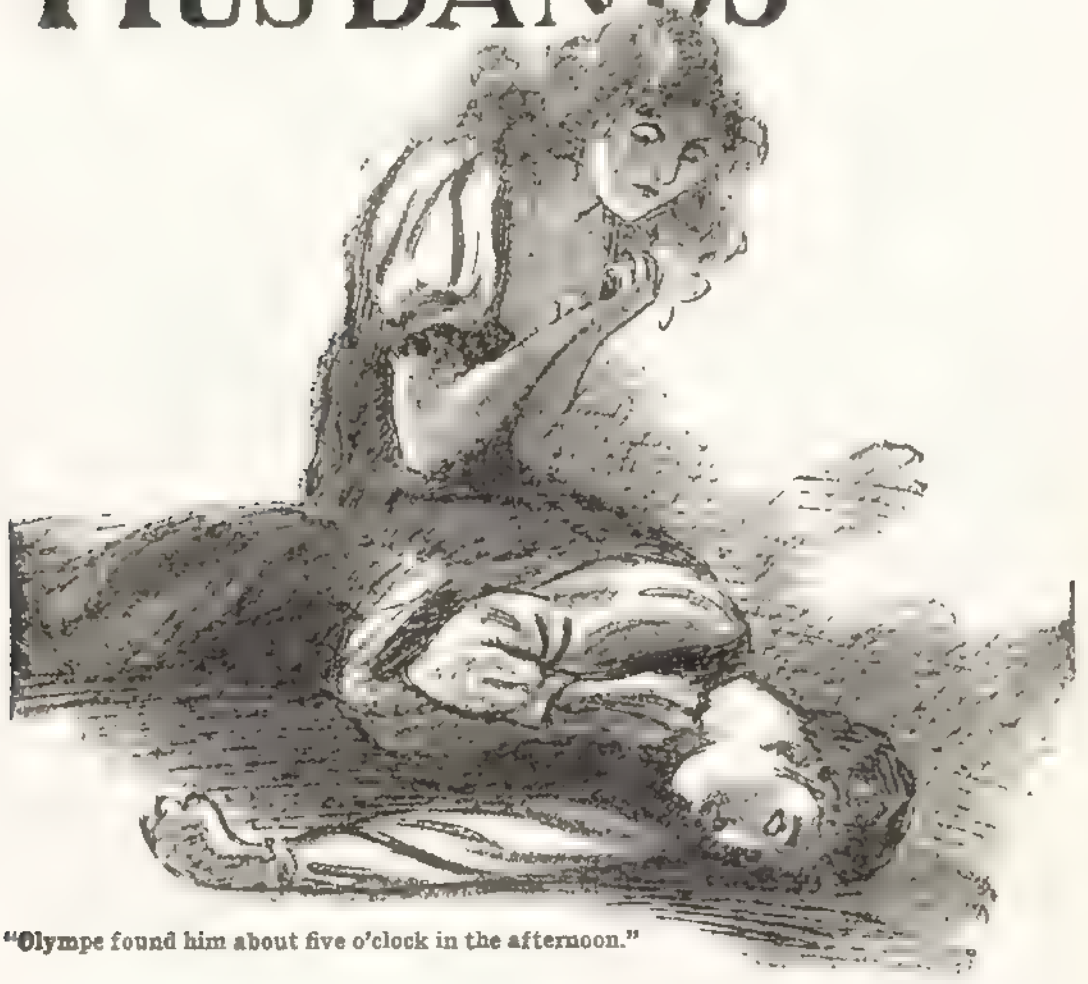
"Oh, this doesn't date from yesterday," Zinzin murmured with a sinister laugh.

"Then why so much excitement today?"

"I'll tell you why shortly," the other replied dismally. "I was mixed up in it when I was very young. It narrowly missed making me a landlubber forever with a little garden plot over me! On my word! It's not

Translated by Mildred Gleason Prochet.

of the Four Husbands



"Olympe found him about five o'clock in the afternoon."

the fault of the damned wedding story if I'm not fertilizing a crop of dandelions today. It caused a lot of stir in its time. They even took the case up to the court of assizes!"

"Stories of marriages exist by the legion," grouchy old Chaulieu remarked. "I know ten myself."

"I only know one," Zinzin replied with a groan, "but I warn you that it is more horrible than all ten of Chaulieu's put together!"

He sighed heavily again and lighted his pipe. "I never told you anything about it before," he spat out, "because it seemed such an utterly fantastic affair, but today I must talk! Good God! Good God!"

"Well, what is it? What is it, Zinzin?"

"It is a horrible story." Zinzin choked.

"Perhaps," Chaulieu added quietly and skeptically.

Zinzin cast him a murderous look. "In all my life I have only been in love once," he went on, "and it was that time. It never happened again because I never met another such girl. Her name was Olympe, and there were a dozen of us who wanted to marry her."

"And here the impossible begins," sneered Chaulieu.

"Twelve, I tell you! I'll give you their names in a moment, and that doesn't include those who did not openly propose. There wasn't a man in the whole country who would not have wanted to. She wasn't rich, but she came of good family—and beautiful! At the time of which I speak she was just seventeen years old. Her section of the country was noted for its beautiful women—a big pleasant suburb worth visiting if only to watch the girls come home from church on Sundays.

"Well! In all the town there was not one girl fit to tie her shoes, and that meant a lot. . . . Listen, if you have ever gone to Cagnes, perhaps you have seen Renoir's portraits of young girls. . . . Those pictures are pure fantasy—pictures of flowers and sunlight, not humans. Well, Olympe was like that: a ray of sun and the petals of a rose. A dream! But a dream with eyes and a mouth! . . . enormous childish eyes with supernatural purity in their gaze, and the mouth of a woman! The mouth alone was of flesh and blood! Olympe was like an angel come down to earth to kiss!

"We were all crazy about her. She lived alone with her grandmother, who had taken her from school at the death of her parents and entrusted her to the safe care of the servant Palmire, who was the girl's willing slave. Olympe was still much of a child, often playing with the country urchins, returning home with armfuls of wild flowers, baskets filled with wild strawberries. She would run behind the flocks with the sheep-dogs when she crossed them on the road, and often scandalized the old women by returning home at night astride a goat!

"In nice weather the old people would sit outside their doors on little wooden benches and wait for her to come. She had a wonderful imagination and told them stories which she made up as she went along.

"The grandmother, who in her day had been the beautiful Madame Gratien, lived in a big old house on the Place de l'Abbaye. The gardens were closed in by walls and at the back looked out on the open country. She knew all the élite of the neighborhood and had maintained connections in the city.

"The behavior of her granddaughter had amused her in the beginning but at last it began to preoccupy her. Olympe seemed very thoughtless for her age. . . . What would happen when she was alone in the world? Madame Gratien suddenly decided to marry her off as soon as possible.

"She had already received several offers for the hand of her granddaughter, and when it was known that she no longer discouraged suitors, they besieged her on all sides. This flood of admirers was a new game for Olympe. Finally one Sunday we were all gathered in the living-room, when the grandmother gave Olympe a little talking-to. She told her that she was beginning to be very tired and weary with life and that she would like to see Olympe settled down before she died. Olympe greeted this announcement with tears. We thought that the

prospect of the old lady's death saddened her, but Olympe explained it differently. 'As though it were gay to marry!' she said when we tried to cheer her up.

"We burst out laughing at that and all swore that her husband would be perfectly willing to be her slave.

" 'First of all, I do not want to leave Grandmother,' she said, 'nor Palmire . . . And secondly I want to live in our old house.'

" 'Agreed, agreed,' we answered in chorus.

" 'And now,' said good Madame Gratien, 'which one are you going to choose?'

" 'Oh, we'll talk of that later,' said Olympe. 'This is no way to marry people off. You're really not serious about it, Grandmother!'

" 'For six months you've said the same thing: that you'd talk it over later. Now, it's become a joke. You know that I have always done everything you wanted before. . . . Come; if you were obliged to choose one of these gentlemen, which would you take?'

"Olympe suddenly became serious, and we watched her anxiously. . . . In spite of our apparent acceptance of the whole thing as a joke, we were dead serious. . . .

"She stood up, walked around us, and sized us up from head to foot with such funny expressions that we were more than a little embarrassed. If I live to be a thousand, I'll never forget that scene! What an examination! To be truthful, we hardly dared breathe.

"She made us stand, lined us up, placing us, changing us—advancing a man to the head of the line and then, after looking him straight in the eyes, sending him back to third or fourth position. The grandmother encouraged us from time to time with a 'Hold yourselves well, gentlemen! . . . Hold yourselves well! . . . Be serious.'

"It was funny when one thinks that we were not all young men either! I well remember the arrival of the town registrar, respectable Monsieur Pacifire, who for two years had openly bid for Olympe's hand. He came late and naturally did not know what it was all about.

"She met him at the door and placed him, dumfounded, at the end of the line. He had the last number! You can imagine how we laughed. But you can bet that when he knew what it was all about, he did not laugh at all!

" 'At last! It is done!' she announced. 'If I marry I'll take Monsieur Delphin *first*, then Monsieur Hubert, then Monsieur Sabin, then my little Zinzin (as you see, I was number four), then Monsieur Jacobini . . .' and she went on down the whole twelve of us. . . . I'll enumerate them: 1st, Monsieur Delphin, a nice fellow with a great future ahead of him, son of the town pharmacist; he had taken his degree in science, was working for a fellowship in chemistry and was very well spoken of at the university. 2d. Monsieur Hubert, still young, about twenty-five, head forest warden. 3d. Dr. Felix Sabin, just out of college, and as merry as a lark . . . I think he had settled himself in the country with the idea of getting into politics. 4th. Yours truly, who had already taken to the sea but who would have given it all up to stay with Olympe. 5th. Lieutenant Jacobini, son of a colonel in the guards, a distinguished, smart fellow who had just come back from a mission in South Africa where he had made something of a name for himself. 6th. The son of a big land-owner with lots of money. 7th. A young lawyer. 8th. The son of a solicitor. 9th. An old notary. 10th. A traveling salesman. 11th. The assistant of the district attorney. 12th. Monsieur Pacifire, the

registrar . . . yes, that makes twelve. We were only twelve that day!

"Six months later, Olympe married number one, young Delphin. We all went to the wedding—but not to have a good time. I tried to reason against it, but I would have given anything to be in Delphin's shoes. The following year, however, I no longer envied him. He was dead!

"No one knows exactly what he died of. They say that he was poisoned by some laboratory work, but nothing was sure. The physician who attended him, Dr. Sabin, shook his head when he was questioned. I think that in reality he thought of only one thing: in short, that he had now become number two and that if anything were to happen to the forest warden who preceded him, he might yet hope for a chance!

"It seemed impossible, but Olympe had become even lovelier since her marriage. Now, when she passed in her widow's weeds, she was something to kneel before and worship. But she did not mourn her dead husband for long. In fact, if one can believe old Palmire, Monsieur Delphin was not excessively gay and for a young husband spent too much time in his laboratories, leaving his young wife for entire days while he searched for heaven knows what in the bottoms of his test-tubes.

"Monsieur Hubert's turn was bound to arrive, and he did not lose time in pressing his suit and in promising her all the gayeties that she had missed since her first marriage. He was a jolly fellow, that Hubert, fond of good food, an excellent drinker and hunter as was fitting with a man of his position and name.

"Big celebrations and big parties now took place at Olympe's. She began to ride horseback and there was not another like her for fifty miles around. It was a sight to see her hunt the deer and wild boar. Nothing frightened her. We had trouble to keep up with her, and afterward she presided over the banquet with a sparkle and an ardor that gave us all fever.

"She was more courted than ever, but she made fun of us, and kept her loveliest and gayest smiles for Dr. Sabin. 'He is number three,' she exclaimed, laughing. 'Everyone in turn!'

"'Hey!' Hubert interrupted. 'I never felt better in my life!'

"'And I take care of him,' replied the doctor. 'He is the one man whom I'm not permitted to kill. Thank the fortune, Hubert, which prohibits me from choosing my victims!'

"This was all very nice, but it seemed to me that Dr. Sabin made too much use of his position of family doctor in order to be familiar with Olympe. They were often seen alone in the park back of the house, or even going for a little outing in the forest when Hubert, called away on business or some bachelor party in the neighboring town, left Olympe for a few hours. She had become the general topic of conversation in the village. She scandalized the habitués of the five o'clock teas at Madame Tabureau's, the mayor's wife, or at Madame Blancmougin's, the wife of the solicitor whose son had received number eight in the general classing. Madame Blancmougin never ceased congratulating herself on her son's lucky escape.

"In fact, after the death of old Madame Gratien, which had occurred in the meantime, Olympe no longer kept her desires within any limits and she frightened many people by the liberty of those desires. Hubert made no attempt to restrain her. He was amused and flattered by the number of victims won by those innocent blue eyes and that bright mouth which seemed to be always asking for a kiss.

"He was a good liver, that Hubert, but not a real lover. 'My!' Palmire

would whisper to those who liked to be informed of all that went on in the house, 'he certainly loves his food more than his bed. If *Madame* were not so honest, that fact might give him a bad jolt!'

"And so saying, she shook her head on seeing Olympe and Dr. Sabin come in from one of the lessons in driving. Those driving-lessons had started a lot of gossip which was cut short by a new misfortune in Place de l'Abbaye.

"Delphin had installed a laboratory in an isolated building in a far corner of the grounds and this Hubert had made into a sort of hunting-pavilion. He had furnished it with his guns, his knives, his rifles, his pistols, and had also stored his ammunition there. It was like a little armory, with the exception of the walls, which were decorated with the usual trophies. It was a pleasant little spot, covered with climbing vines and flowers, and there was a fine view of the fields and country beyond. He often had lunch served there in order to be alone with his wife or friends away from the ears of the servants.

"It was there that Hubert was found one afternoon in August with a pistol in his hands and a bullet through his heart.

"Suicide or accident? Several even murmured the word: crime! . . . but it was said so low that no one heard them.

"You can imagine what a stir it caused. An inquest was held. The assistant district attorney, who was number eleven, managed the affair. It was Dr. Sabin, number three, who was called to give his opinion on the nature of the death. He pronounced it accident. The inquest hesitated a long time between accident and suicide, but they finally concluded with the theory of the accident.

"'My goodness!' Palmire sighed when she was besieged by many wanting to know what *Madame* had to say about the death of her husband. 'What should she say? She knew nothing about it, of course. She had lunched in the little pavilion with *Monsieur*. . . . They both had seemed very gay. She left him at about two-thirty in order to dress, for she was going to town with Dr. Sabin. About three o'clock the gardener heard a shot and ran to the pavilion. He found *Monsieur* stretched out dead. And now you know as much as we do. Why should he have committed suicide? Life was beautiful and so was Olympe. He had everything to make him happy. And now Olympe is crying her eyes out, which is a stupid thing to do. No one is responsible for an accident, and it was his fault for not being more careful!'

"So spoke Palmire. The next year Olympe married Dr. Sabin."

"I expected it," interrupted Chaulieu; "if your blue-eyed angel with the passionate mouth had to give herself to all twelve of those gentlemen we haven't finished and it's not going to be a funny tale."

"I didn't promise you a funny story. I told you that it was horrible. Olympe did not give herself to all twelve, since I was number four and I'm still alive. Nevertheless, I excuse Chaulieu for his remark because in the village they began to say: 'They'll all go. She's capable of it.'

"'And why not? If it pleases Olympe?' Palmire replied whenever she heard something of that kind. And she added, scratching her long chin, 'She would be wrong in hesitating over it as far as the worth of those men is concerned!'

"It was a terrible thing that she said, in the ignorance of a servant ready to perjure her soul for her mistress.

"Dr. Sabin was certainly a courageous fellow to marry into a household which seemed destined to misfortune. Some good old woman of the kind particularly skilful in slipping in a

malicious remark between a frown and a smile, remarked, however, 'Oh, nothing will happen to *him*. He knows what he is doing!'

"The town was a-buzz with horrible remarks. Poor doctor! He did not deserve what was said, since he, too, died, exactly three months to the day after his wedding. He lasted even a shorter time than the others."

"Good Lord!" Gaubert whistled.

"And so it came your turn," said Captain Michel.

"It's beginning to be very amusing," remarked Chaulieu.

But they all stopped joking. Zinzin had become terribly pale and his hand trembled as he put down his glass. He looked with wild eyes at a man who was approaching the table.

"Hello," exclaimed the captain, "here's the police commissioner's orderly."

It was he in fact, and he bent over and whispered in Zinzin's ear:

"We've just had a telephone message. She has been dead ten years. You don't need to worry any longer." And with that he departed.

As for Zinzin, he staggered into the captain's arms and had to be taken home.

"Let's hope he doesn't kick off before the end of his story," said Gaubert gently.

Chaulieu shrugged his shoulders. "Bah," he said, "he is working for a climactic effect."

Nevertheless we did not know the end of the story until eight days later. Zinzin certainly had been very ill. This time we listened without interrupting him.

"IT WAS my turn then, number four's turn. But I was still ignorant of the fact. I was sailing in the Baltic Sea when the thing happened, and I did not learn it until my return ashore. I threw myself on a train for home and on the way met Lieutenant Jacobini, number five, who had himself returned only a short while ago.

"Our trip was not a merry one. I confess that in spite of the certainty I now had of being able to marry Olympe and in spite of the hope Lieutenant Jacobini had of soon being able to cheer up my widow, this double prospect did not fill us with merriment. The house on Place de l'Abbaye seemed less like a place of joy to us now and more like a tomb!

"The first thing I asked Jacobini, after he had told me the sinister news, was naturally if he could give me a few details on the doctor's death. How had he died? He answered gloomily that he hadn't the faintest idea and that no one else had either; but that he more than anyone wanted to get to the bottom of it. That was the reason for his return.

" 'And you?' he asked me.

" 'Oh,' I answered, 'as for me, you can understand that I am interested in the matter at least as much as you are.'

" 'Yes,' he replied without the slightest sarcasm, 'I understand that. . . . It is an even more urgent matter for you.'

" 'But,' I went on, 'they must have called his death by some name!'

" 'Not any more of a name than they gave the death of Olympe's first husband. They claimed that Delphin was poisoned by some laboratory experiment, but the thing was never proved. And as far as Dr. Sabin is concerned it can't be that.'

" 'All these deaths are certainly very strange! Tell me, Jacobini, aren't the police interested in this?'

" 'Yes. Our assistant district attorney, number eleven, has ordered an investigation. I ought to add that Olympe was the first to ask it. . . . They made an autopsy on the body. . . .'

" 'And?'

" 'And found nothing. . . . But

that doesn't prove a thing,' he added in a tone which struck me.

"'What do you mean? Have you a suspicion?'

"'In such matters,' replied Jacobini, 'it is not permissible to have suspicions. One must be certain or keep still.' And he kept still.

"But all this did not tend to quiet my anxiety.

"'Then he died in his bed? Was he ill?'

"'No! Olympe found him about five o'clock in the afternoon in his room, stretched out on the floor with a table and chair overturned, his mouth still foaming and his face distorted from horror. . . . It was proved that he had been in the room alone from three o'clock on and that the house was completely deserted, as the servants had gone to a near-by fair.'

"'And—Madame Sabin?'

"'She had lunched with him in the little pavilion at the end of the garden and had remained there to embroider with Palmire.'

"'Then what was the conclusion of the inquest?'

"'That Dr. Sabin died from an attack of epilepsy.'

"'Was he subject to it?'

"'No, but it seems that that does not always follow.'

"We were silent a long time. Then I sighed.

"'We ought to be sincerely sorry for Olympe,' I said, 'because otherwise it would be too horrible.'

"'Yes,' he replied after thinking a moment, 'you are right! It would be too horrible. . . . She must be pitied. Besides, Palmire says that she is completely crushed. No one ever sees her now. She never goes out. According to gossip she wants to enter a convent. . . . It is natural enough that after three unfortunate marriages like these she should be sick of matrimony—and—and I congratulate you,' he added with a strange laugh. Then he went on quickly, because he was an extremely polite fellow: 'I hope I haven't pained you in saying that?'

"'I don't know,' I answered.

"We arrived an hour later. We hadn't forewarned anyone and it was already late at night. We had decided to go directly to the Hotel de Bourgogne, and I was surprized to find the solicitor's son, number eight, waiting for us on the platform. I remember his name now; he was called Juste. There is nothing to say about him except that he was an honest fellow, and that Dr. Sabin had often treated him for rheumatism.

"'I knew that you had landed,' he said to me, 'and that you were taking this train. What hotel are you going to?'

"'To the Bourgogne with Lieutenant Jacobini.'

"Juste had been so preoccupied with me that he hadn't noticed my companion. He shook him warmly by the hand and said that he would go with us.

"I was growing more puzzled every moment. At the hotel he followed me to my room and gave me a packet for which he asked a receipt.

"'This was intrusted to my honor,' he said, 'with the mission of giving into your own hands.'

"I examined the sealed envelope quickly and recognized the writing immediately. My name was written on the outside with the addition: 'To be delivered after my death.'

"'Yes,' the other replied, 'I have accomplished my mission and I am only accountable to him; but since I haven't the faintest idea of what is contained in that letter, I want a receipt, to be on the safe side.'

"I gave him his receipt.

"'In giving you this letter,' I asked, 'Dr. Sabin said nothing special?'

"'Not a thing,' he replied. 'He told me nothing, absolutely nothing.'

"Upon which he shook my hand and took leave of me a bit hurriedly. He seemed free of a great weight. I opened the letter feverishly.

"Ten minutes later someone knocked at Jacobini's door. He was just about to get into bed and called out, asking who was there. As no one answered him, he went to the door and opened it impatiently. A ghost with a letter in its hands entered his room. This ghost was I and I hadn't strength enough even to speak. He sat me down, took the letter from my hands, locked the door and read.

"I will never forget him as he stood there, bent over the lamp. The letter which had plunged me into a sort of prostration had an entirely different effect on him. Everything about him seemed to tighten up while with me there had been a complete loosening of my will-power. He frowned heavily, his eyebrows were knitted, his chin grew more prominent, and a dangerous flame like the cold steel flash of a sword lit the eyes intent on reading the document, a document which had been written by the trembling hand of a man who knew himself condemned to death.

"THIS is what Dr. Sabin had written. The original has long been in the police files but this is a copy:

Dear Zinzin:

Before marrying Olympe I want you to read this: It is a man who is about to die who is writing you. I have been horribly poisoned. No one knows it except the guilty one or guilty ones and me. I have not complained, for I have got only what I deserved. Thanks to strong drugs I have been able at times to overcome the pain which is destroying me and still to appear human. Thus I have been able to see Juste without giving anything away to him, nor will you tell him anything unless he, too, should want to marry Olympe — in which case you will show him this letter. But I hope that this will be the end of the matter and that after my death no one will wish to take my place, our place, the place of the three men who have entered this house full of health and life and who have disappeared from it, carrying with them the enigma of their triple misfortune.

As far as possible keep scandal from Olympe. I have loved her too much. I still love her, perhaps. No scandal, therefore, unless it be absolutely necessary. And besides, I am certain of nothing. In such a case, proof of the guilt is necessary, and I have none. I might be able to accuse her with a chance of not making a mistake, but I haven't the right; and I will tell you why. You know that after Hubert's death I returned a verdict of suicide. But Hubert did not commit suicide. Hubert was murdered!

And I knew the truth at my first sight of the body by the position of the pistol in his hand. The weapon had been placed in his hand, after his death! I won't go into details, but I could have proved it very easily. I had been called immediately after the discovery of the body in the hope that perhaps life still stirred within him, but it was all over. Next to the corpse stood Olympe in tears. Before looking at the woman I had seen the pistol and had already reached a conclusion. Then I looked at the woman. You may have suspected the affectionate ties that bound us already. Besides, Olympe made no effort to hide the truth, and I had spoken to her about it more than once. Looking at her, it seemed to me that her eyes wavered after catching mine and they left me the impression of an ardent and silent plea. Even today I am sure that I was not mistaken and I feel a chill of horror. That woman killed Hubert in order to be mine! It was horrible, but I adored her, and not only did I not

denounce her, but without her noticing and for pity of her I slipped the pistol into the correct position. I made the matter easy for the board of experts. You see, Zinzin, old man, I'm not hiding anything from you. You understand now why I haven't the right to accuse this woman. My cowardice has made me her accomplice.

I think we loved each other like the damned, trying to forget in the embrace of love a lost paradise. Between us there never came a thought of Hubert or of Delphin. One would have said that Olympe had never known those two men. But I, I was curious to know how Delphin had died and I began a cunning investigation which one day they must have noticed. From that day on, I am sure, my death was decided.

Certain contradictory remarks made by Palmire concerning Delphin's experiments and the rather mysterious circumstances of his death led me to certain clues in which I found the almost certainty of Olympe's guilt in the poisoning of Delphin with Palmire as an accomplice. I had not said anything yet to Olympe, who did not seem to suspect my thoughts. I attempted to keep as hidden as possible the hideous suspicions. But one day I felt that I had been struck! A high fever, a strange uneasiness and dull pains warned me that I had been poisoned. I still said nothing because I wanted to know—to know. And I believed that I had done the necessary things to save me in time from a drug which was already attacking the sources of life—and which I could not rid myself of.

How did they go about it? . . . To make sure that it was she, I ate nothing except what she gave me, and we drank from the same glass. Yes, but we did not eat from the same plate! Ah, what horror! . . . And this is where the matter rests today as I write you this letter. . . . I have just had an attack which I have concealed from her. Is she really ignorant of it? Or does she find pleasure in it? Lord God! And yet my face has changed in these last weeks and several times I have pushed her from my arms. Still she seems to have noticed nothing. Oh, the monster! The two monsters! Yes, two, because I have discovered Palmire spying on me and the two of them are always together. Nevertheless, Olympe said to me yesterday: "It's funny how men change after a few weeks of marriage! After a short while they are unrecognizable. They are no longer interesting!"

Zinzin, you will have this letter and I am going to talk to her. But I won't be telling her anything she doesn't already know. She must believe by now that I know by whose hands her first two husbands were killed; but I must tell her that I know that she is killing the third and that she must stop there!

Ah, Olympe, our Olympe! . . . If you knew, Zinzin, you would understand—and you would pardon me. . . . Perhaps, after all, she is not guilty—perhaps Palmire is responsible, perhaps Palmire did it all alone. Ah, my God, if that could be true! . . . This is an idea which has come to me a little late—too late! . . . Think it over, Zinzin. I am past thinking now. I suffer too much. . . . And yet I do not like to die without knowing. If she could only prove to me that it is Palmire who did it alone! I love her still, Zinzin!

"After this last line the writing was so disordered and jumbled that it was difficult to read, and the signature which followed seemed to express the supreme effort of a man from whom life is escaping. And yet Dr. Sabin could not have died that day. Probably by the feverish use of some medicine he was able to suspend his destiny. We know that the unfortunate man did not die until after lunch the next day. . . .

"I made the copy which you have just read," Zinzin continued, "that same night, because Lieutenant Jacobini demanded the original. He had the right to it, *since he was going to take my place!* I said all the things that you or anyone would say in such horrible circumstances; but I realized that his mind was made up and that there was nothing more to do. Of course, it was no longer a question of love for Olympe.

"He had made a vow, a vow to punish her for her crimes. He would force her to confess, make her give herself up, and then we would see! . . .

"He did not tell me what we would see, but it was easy enough to understand on catching sight of his fierce, terrible look when he spoke.

" 'Dr. Sabin got his just deserts,' he said to me, 'and I do not pity him; but that poor Hubert was my friend, and Delphin I loved as a younger brother and *I may be responsible for his death.* Therefore, I, Jacobini, am going to avenge them.'

"To accomplish that he decided to marry Olympe.

" 'And if she doesn't want to marry?' I asked him.

"He laughed a horrible laugh. 'A woman like her will not refuse a man like me!'

"He was right. Olympe married number five and I was best man for Jacobini. He insisted upon it. During the ceremony he stood with his arms crossed at the foot of the chancel beside his kneeling bride and looked already like a statue of vengeance. Olympe was no longer the girl we had all known and loved. There was something strangely funereal in her beauty and it seemed already to be bending under the hand of death. She looked like the figures in marble one sees on tombstones. I never expected to see her again, for the next day I set out to sea.

"At every port I threw myself on the newspapers; I opened my mail with trembling, feverish hands. No news reached me of the hideous tragedy that I felt must have been happening at home during my absence. When, three months later, I returned, my first question was . . . yes, you have guessed it. . . .

" 'Is nothing changed around here?'

" 'Goodness, no.'

" 'And how are the Jacobinis?'

" 'The Jacobinis are fine,' I was told.

"The next day Jacobini came to call on me. He knew that I had just returned. He looked exceedingly well and had prolonged his furlough, since Olympe refused to leave the house even though he hated it. 'At heart I can't blame her,' he explained. 'She believes that if she leaves the house and this town where she spent such a happy youth it will look as though the evil tongues which claim she had a hand in the death of her three husbands have some cause for their suspicions.'

"I looked at Jacobini, but he met my gaze clearly.

" 'I understand your astonishment,' he said, 'but Olympe is not to be suspected.'

" 'So much the better, so much the better. Let's drop the subject, then.'

" 'Zinzin!'

" 'Yes, Jacobini!'

" 'I have come to talk to you and you must listen to me. The first thing I did on returning to the house after the wedding was to show her Dr. Sabin's letter. Olympe cried, but did not seem in the least astonished.

" " "I had a suspicion of that," she confessed to me. "Everybody thinks I am a monster. I wonder that you wanted to marry me."

" " "I will tell you why in due time," I replied, "but for the moment we are concerned with Dr. Sabin's letter."

" " "What can I say?" she con-

tinued bitterly. "I am no more guilty of Hubert's death, of which they suspect me, than I am of my first husband's. Sabin loved me madly, and there were moments when his love was strangely like hatred. He let drop words from time to time that made me understand his horrible thought . . . and he started an abominable investigation. He questioned Palmire, who repeated everything to me. I tried to quiet him. Above all I wanted to avoid any scandal. I told myself that his state of mind would pass with time and that as I had nothing to hide, he would end by understanding that we were all the victims of a horrible fate. Then suddenly he believed himself poisoned. He did not tell me in the beginning. I myself did not mention the word 'poison', so that nothing definite should happen between us. I did not want to be forced to call in the police or to send him from the house, but as he continued to suffer I suggested that he consult a doctor. He did nothing. The day of his death he was under the influence of a strong drug that made him delirious. He insisted on coming to the table, and as I knew what he suspected I made a point of drinking only what he drank and of eating from the same plate. At the dessert he threw himself at my feet and begged my pardon for having suspected me. He said he knew now that he was being poisoned by 'that horrible Palmire'. And he begged me to aid him in fastening the guilt on her. As I tried naturally to defend her, he left me abruptly and locked himself in his room. You know the rest. It was I who asked for an autopsy."'

"Lieutenant Jacobini stopped.

"'And that convinced you of her innocence?' I asked.

"'No,' he answered. 'If Olympe expected something of the nature of Sabin's letter, I was ready for an explanation such as she gave me with a few tears thrown into the bargain. My next remark to my bride of an hour was very abrupt. "And what about the tali-tali, Olympe? What have you done with it?" I asked.

"'She started and turned a deathly white. "Oh," she moaned, "so you think that I poisoned him with tali-tali?"*

"'I took her by the wrist and it was like holding a hand of marble. "Listen, Olympe: Hubert died of an accident. I'll grant that and it doesn't matter to me; but Delphin was my friend and he and Dr. Sabin died the same death. They were both poisoned by the tali-tali which leaves no trace. It was I who gave the poison to Delphin that he might analyze it and find an antidote if possible. I brought it back with me on my last return from Africa and I want to know what has become of it. It is a terrible poison which the wizards down there give to the unfortunates who are suspected of having brought the anger of bad spirits on the village. Its victims are legion. . . . I am responsible for what it has done in France. . . . What have you done with the tali-tali, Olympe?"

"'Olympe looked up at me with frozen eyes. She was no longer crying. "There is no more tali-tali," she answered.

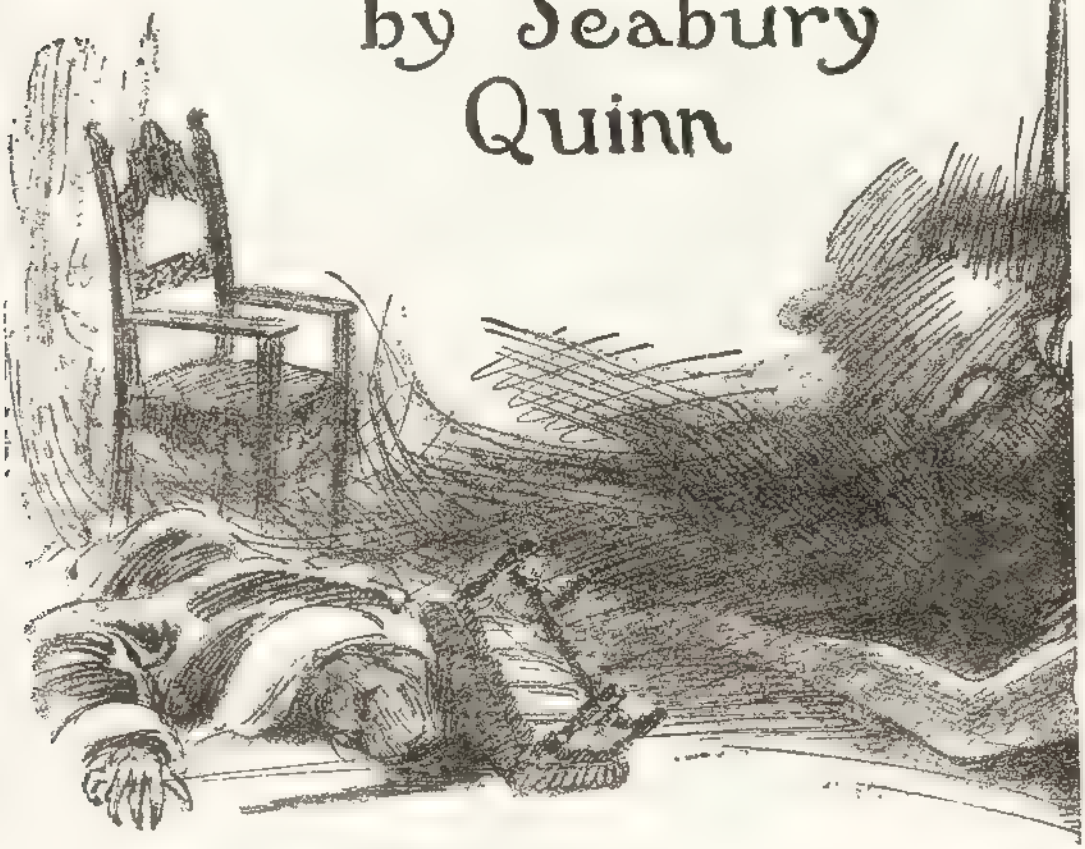
"'"Since when?" I asked brutally, trying to gain control over her

*The tali-tali of which Lieutenant Jacobini speaks here is certainly a close relative of the poison described in Andre Demaison's work. In the *Diato* is written: "A man was hovering over the cauldron in which boiled the roots and bark of the sacred tree. At its name the children were terrified and the adults lost their mind; but the sorcerer, who was now pouring rice into the horrible soup, had declared that the poison could only harm those who sucked the marrow from the bones of their own kind. . . ." And this is the picture of those put to the test: "The unfortunates fell to the ground, letting out hoarse and horrible cries of pain. The bodies curled into a ball like partridges wounded by the hunter's bullet, or ducks with their necks cut before life is lost with the flow of blood." The tali-tali of which Lieutenant Jacobini speaks produces fulminating effects if taken in a large dose. In other cases the poisoning may be slow. Sometimes it takes twenty-four hours for it to manifest itself in all its force. The victim, as happened to Dr. Sabin, seems to have fallen from an epileptic fit.

(Continued on page 860)

Children of

by Seabury Quinn



JULES DE GRANDIN paused in the act of helping himself to a second—and larger—portion of broiled weakfish from the hot-water dish and regarded the big, red-headed man entering the breakfast room with a quick, affectionate smile. *"C'est véritablement toi, mon vieux?"* he exclaimed. *"Morbleu,* I have joy in this meeting, my friend!"

"It's me, right enough, sor," Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello admitted with a somewhat rueful grin as he seated himself in response to my invitation and accepted a cup of steaming, well-creamed coffee, "an' I'm in a peck o' trouble, as I usually am when I come disturbin' you an' Dr. Trowbridge at yer breakfasts."

"I am glad—I mean I grieve—no, *pardieu,* I mean I sorrow at your trouble, but rejoice that you have come!" the little Frenchman returned. "Besides, in addition to your own so excellent self, you undoubtlessly bring me a problem worthy of my cleverness. Seldom have

Ubasti

"With a shrill, ear-splitting scream it was upon her."

you failed to do so when you come with a sad mouth and laughing eyes to tell me of your worries. Say on, my friend; I listen."

The big Irishman emptied his cup with a gigantic gulp and wrinkled his weather-tanned forehead like a puzzled mastiff. "Beggin' yer pardon, Dr. de Grandin, sor," he replied, "I ain't even sure I've got what ye might rightly call a case a-tall. It's just sumpin sort o' peculiar-like I run into today. Have ye been readin' th' newspaper accounts o' th' accident

that kilt young Tom Calebson last night?"

"H'm," de Grandin spread a bit of butter on his fish and watched it slowly dissolve, "you do refer to the mishap which occurred on the Albemarle Pike—the unfortunate young man who died when his car crashed against a roadside tree and he went through the windshield?"

"That's what they say, sor."

"Eh, how is that?"

"Th' coroner's jury returned a verdict o' death by misadventure," the detective answered. "O' course, it wuzn't anny o' my business, strictly speakin', to be nosin' into things that didn't concern me, but us men on th' force gets that way, ye know, sor—has to turn over every stone we find along th' road. Annyhow, I thought I'd drop round to th' morgue an' take a look at th' pore lad, an' give th' autymobile he died in th' once-over, too. Well, sor——" he paused, a diffident smile hovering on his lips.

"Yes, and then?"

"Well, sor, I've seen lots o' bodies that's ben kilt in motor accidents, an' some o' them was pretty awful, but I never seen nothin' like this. Th' only wounds th' lad had on 'im was a big, jagged gash in th' throat—just one—an' some funny-lookin' scratches alongside his neck, an'——" again he paused, as though undecided whether to continue or not.

"*Cordieu*, is it a game of patience we play here?" de Grandin demanded testily. "Get on with your recital, great slow one, or I must twist your neck!"

I laughed outright at this threat of the sparrow to chastise the turkey cock, and even Costello's gravity gave way to a grin, but he sobered quickly as he continued: "Well, sor, onct, when I wuz servin' in th' Phillypines, one o' th' fellies in our outfit got took for a ride be th' Moros on Mindanao. They grabbed th' pore chap unawares, sor, an' took 'im back in th' jungle for torture. He wuz hung up be th' feet, wid his throat cut an' all th' blood drained from his pore carcass when we found 'im. That's th' way young Calebson looked to me, sor—all empty-like, if ye get what I mean."

"*Parfaitement.* And——"

"Yes, sor, I wuz comin' to that, too. I went round to th' garage where they'd put his car and looked it over most partic'lar."

"Yes?" de Grandin's narrow black brows moved upward till they described twin narrow, saracenic arches.

"No, sor, th' divil of a stain wuz annywhere, except maybe a drop or two on th' floor an' a little, tiny patch o' dried blood on the seat. Th' front o' th' windshield an' th' hood o' th' car wuz clean as th' palm o' me hand. Besides that, sor—say, did ye ever see a felly that had been all chawed up by one o' them big cats?"

"Cats?"

"Yes, sor—tigers, or lions, an' th' like o' that. They moved th' outfit I served wid over to China durin' th' Boxer Uprisin', an' some o' th' boys got a tour o' duty up country. I wuz at a village inland where a woman had been mauled to death by one o' them big blue tigers they have over there—th' brute tore her throat out an' clawed her up sumpin' dreadful before th' heathens come out wid drums an' firecrackers an' a few guns an' scared him away. An'——"

"*Mort d'un rat*, do you tell me so? This poor one's injuries were like those of the unfortunate Chinawoman?"

"Per-*cise*-ly, sor. That's why I'm here. I figgered out that if he'd died natural-like, as a result o' th' accident; his car ought to been wringin' wet wid blood, but, as I wuz after tellin' ye——"

"You have said it!" de Grandin agreed with a vigorous nod. "This business, it has the smell of herring on it, my friend. Come, let us go." He disposed of the remaining morsel

of fish, drained his coffee cup and rose abruptly.

"Never fear, Friend Trowbridge," he declared as he thrust his arms through the sleeves of his topcoat, "I shall return in ample time for Madame Heacote's *soirée* tonight; but at present I am consumed with curiosity to view this strange young man who died of a cut throat, yet bled not at all."

I watched them as they strode down the street beneath the autumn-tinted leaves. The big Irish policeman, treading lightly as a dancer, for all his great bulk, marched along with a slight sway from left to right, the lasting souvenir of his years of service with the infantry; beside him, advancing almost at a run, the slight, diminutive Frenchman walked with the sharp, jerky quick-step characteristic of the army of France. An oddly assorted couple they were, far apart as the poles in birth, upbringing and education, yet knit together by that bond of brotherhood which unites all born man-hunters. Probably, I reflected, nothing more than vague surmise was behind Costello's half-formed suspicions; yet were any evil-doer involved in the business, he would be well advised to put as much distance between himself and that incongruous partnership as the limitations of earth allowed.

2

JULES DE GRANDIN pirouetted on gleaming, patent-leather-shod toes like a preening bird. "Consider me, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded. "Behold and admire. Am I not superb, magnificent? *Parbleu,* this night I shall dazzle; I shall scintillate; I shall be the pride of all the ladies, the despair of all the men. Is it not so?"

To do him justice, he was more than usually ornate. Though his excursion with Sergeant Costello had kept him from breakfast till a few minutes before dinner time, and he had spent less than twenty minutes at his toilet, he was arrayed in a manner to challenge the reputation of Solomon and his glory. About his neck hung the insignia of the Legion of Honor; a row of miniature medals including the French and Belgian war crosses, the *Médaille Militaire* and the Italian Medal for Valor decorated the left breast of his faultless evening coat; his little wheat-blond mustache was waxed to needle sharpness and his sleek blond hair was brushed and brilliantined till it fitted flat against his shapely little head like a skullcap of gleaming beige satin.

"Humph," I commented as I surveyed him, "if you'll behave as well as you look, I suppose you'll be all right."

"*O, lá, lá,* hear him preach!" He grinned elfishly as he patted the white gardenia in his buttonhole with gentle but unqualifiedly approving fingers. "Come, let us go. I desire to arrive at Madame Heacote's before the refreshments are entirely exhausted, if you please." He flung his long, military-cut evening coat about him with the air of a comic-opera conspirator, picked up his lustrous top hat and gold-headed ebony walking-stick and strode debonairly toward the door.

"Just a moment," I called as the desk 'phone gave a short, chattering ring.

"Hullo, Trowbridge, Donovan speaking," a heavy voice announced as I picked up the receiver. "Can you bring that funny little Frog friend of yours over to City Hospital tonight? I've got a brand new variety of nut in the psychopathic ward here—young girl, sane as you or I, apparently, except for an odd fixation. I think she'd interest de Grandin, if——"

"Sorry," I cut in, "de Grandin and I were just going to a shindig at Mrs. Heacote's—I expect it'll be a

frightful bore, but the family are valuable patients, and——"

"Aw, rats!" Dr. Donovan interrupted. "If I had as much money as you, I'd tell all the tea-pouring old ladies to go fly kites. Come on over; this nut is *good*, I tell you. Put your toad-eater on the 'phone; maybe he'll listen to reason, if you won't."

"*Hélas*, I am desolate!" the Frenchman declared as Donovan delivered his invitation. "At present Friend Trowbridge and I go to make great whoopee at Madame Heacote's —later in the evening, if you will be so kind, we shall give ourselves the pleasure of interviewing your so intriguing *Mademoiselle* with the *idée fixe*. You agree? I am delight. We shall be there, my friend; do not doubt it.

"Now, let us depart in haste, right away, at once, before someone else delays us," he urged as he hung up the receiver. "Me, I know these cake-devouring habitués of parties such as tonight's—they will have drunk up all the punch containing champagne and rum, and left us nothing but lemonade, unless we hurry. Let us go."

MRS. HEACOTE'S was the first formal affair of the autumn, and most of the élite of our little city were present, the men still displaying the floridness of golf course and mountain trail on their faces, sun-tan, painfully acquired at fashionable beaches, lying in velvet veneer on the women's arms and shoulders. The big, red-brick house was lit from street to attic, and the strains of a stringed orchestra mingled with the dissonance of shrill feminine chatter as we entered, gave our wraps into the keeping of a trimly uniformed maid and proceeded to pay our duty to our hostess.

Famous lion-huntress that she was, Mrs. Watson Heacote had managed to impound a considerable array of exotic notables for her home-town guests to gape at, and I noted with a hidden smile how her large, pale eyes lighted with momentary elation at sight of de Grandin's decorations. The little Frenchman was quick to understand the situation, and chuckled delightedly as we crossed the room. "*Madame*," he bent over Mrs. Heacote's hand with more than usual ceremony, "believe me, I am deeply sensible of the honor you have conferred on me." He lifted her plump, well-manicured fingers to his lips.

What would have been a simper in anyone less distinguished than Mrs. Watson Heacote spread over the much massaged and carefully lifted features of Harrisonville's social arbiter. "It was sweet of you to come, Dr. de Grandin," she assured him. "Do you know Monsieur Arif? Arif Pasha, Dr. Jules de Grandin—Dr. Trowbridge."

The slender, sallow-skinned young man she presented had the small, regular features, sleek, black hair and dark, slumbrous eyes which made the late Rudolph Valentino the idol of a million women. He bowed jerkily, from the hips in Continental fashion and murmured a polite acknowledgment in stilted English.

"You are, I take it, a stranger like myself, in strange company?" he asked de Grandin as we moved aside for a trio of newcomers.

Further conversation developed that he was attached to the office of the Turkish Consul General at New York, that he had met Mrs. Heacote in London the previous summer and that he would be exceedingly glad when he might bid his hostess good-night.

"*Tiens*, they stare so, these Americans," he complained. "Now, in London or Paris——"

"Monsoor and Modom Bera!" announced the butler, his impressive, full-throated English voice cutting through the staccato of drawing-room chatter as the booming of the surf sounds through the strains of a seaside resort band.

We turned casually to view the newcomers, then kept our eyes at gaze; they were easily the most interesting people in the room. Madame Bera walked a half-pace before her husband, tall, exquisite, exotic as an orchid blooming in a New England garden. Tawny hair, combed close to her small head, framed a broad, white forehead, and under fine, dark-brown brows looked out the most remarkable eyes I had ever seen. Widely separated, the roundness of their shape gave them an illusion of immensity which seemed to diminish her face, and their color was a baffling shade of greenish amber, contrasting oddly with her leonine hair and warm, maize-tan complexion. From cheek to cheek her face was wide, tapering to a pointed chin, and the nostrils of her sensitive, aquiline nose flared slightly, like those of an alert feline scenting hidden danger. Her evening dress, cut rather higher than the prevailing mode, encased her large, supple figure with glove-tightness from breast to waist, then flared outward to an uneven hem which almost swept the floor. Beneath the edge of her sand-colored chiffon gown her feet, in sandals of gold kid, appeared absurdly small as she crossed the room with a lithe, easy stride which seemed pantherine in its effortless grace.

Older by two-score years than his consort, Monsieur Bera yet had something of the same feline ease of movement which characterized her. Like hers, too, his face was wide from cheek to cheek, pointed at the chin and adorned with a hawk-beak nose with unusually wide nostrils. Unlike his wife's, his eyes were not round, but long, inclined to be oblique, and half closed, as though to shade them from the glitter of the electric lights. Fast-thinning gray hair was combed back from his brow in an effort to conceal a noticeable bald spot on his cranium; his heavy mustache, whiter than his hair, was waxed and tightly twisted after the style affected by the former German emperor, and a tiny tuft of white goatee adorned his lower lip. For the rest, he wore a rimless, stringless monocle in his right eye, and through its polished lens seemed to view the assemblage with a sort of sardonic contempt. One thing more in common betwen husband and wife I noticed as they crossed the room—the pale white crystal of their teeth beneath their thin red lips.

"*Ya Allah!*" the young Turk, who stood between de Grandin and me, sunk his fingers into our elbows. "I do not like them—they look as though they belonged to *that people!*"

"Eh, what is it you say?" de Grandin demanded in a sharp whisper.

"It is nothing, sir; you would not understand."

"On the contrary, *Monsieur,* I understand very well, indeed," the Frenchman retorted in a tense voice. "I dislike to remind you, but it has not been many years since your country and mine were at war. The threat of a religious uprising, induced by the Sublime Porte among the tribesmen of North Africa, occupied much thought in our Colonial Office, and I was sent to Tunis to investigate. Disguised as a *Père Blanc*—and other things—I mingled with the natives. It was vile—I had to shave off my mustaches!—but it was instructive. I learned much. I learned, by example, of the djinns which haunt the ruins of Carthage, and of the strange ones who dwell in tombs; a weird, terrible folk without a name—at any rate, without a name which a man may speak aloud, even in the confines of his own house."

Arif Pasha regarded de Grandin with a fearful glance. "You have seen them?" he asked in a low breath.

"I have heard much of them, and their stigmata have been described to me," the Frenchman answered evenly. "Come, let us seek introduction to *la belle* Bera."

"Allah forbid!" the Turk denied, walking hastily away.

The lady proved gracious as she was beautiful. Viewed closely, her strange eyes were stranger still, for they had a trick of contracting their pupils in the light, bringing out the full beauty of their fine irises, and of expanding in shadow until they seemed black as night. Too, I noted, when she smiled her slow, wide smile, all four canine teeth seemed unduly prominent and sharp. This, perhaps, accounted for the startling contrast between her crimson lips and her perfect dentition. Her hands were unusual, too. Small and fine they were, with supple, slender fingers, but extraordinarily broad of palm, and the nails, trimmed to points and very brightly rouged and polished, till they resembled the hennaed finger-tips of a harem odalisk, curved oddly downward over her fingers; had they been longer they would have suggested talons. Her voice was a rich, heavy contralto, and when she spoke slow, hesitant English a purring undertone seemed to run from syllable to syllable.

The odd characteristics which were somehow exotically attractive in his wife were intensified to a degree of unpleasantness in Monsieur Bera. The over-prominent teeth which lent a piquant charm to her smile were a deformity in his cruel, thin-lipped mouth; the overhanging nails which made her long, beautifully formed hands only more attractive were definitely claw-like on his skinny fingers; the queer trick of contracting and expanding his pupils in changing lights gave his narrow, watchful eyes a furtive expression unpleasantly reminiscent of the eyes of a dope-fiend—or of a cruel treacherous cat.

"I am interested," de Grandin declared with the frankness which only he could employ, yet not seem discourteous; "your name, *Madame,* intrigues me greatly. Bera, it is not a French name, yet I heard you announced as *Monsieur et Madame*——"

"We are Tunisians," she replied with a languid smile which displayed her crimson lips and ivory teeth to advantage. "Both my husband and I were born and reared in northern Africa. We came to this country only a short time ago."

"Ah, then I am indeed fortunate," de Grandin smiled delightedly. "Is it by any great good fortune that you reside in this city? If so, I should greatly esteem permission to call and——"

I heard no summons, but Madame Bera evidently did, for with another smile and a friendly little nod she turned from de Grandin before he could complete his request and hastened to Mrs. Heacote's side.

"Beard of a little blue man!" de Grandin made a humorous grimace as he rejoined the young Turk and me; "it would seem Jules de Grandin is losing his appeal for the sex. Was ever the chilled shoulder more effectively presented than by *la charmante* Bera a moment hence?

"Come, my friends," he linked his hands through our elbows and drew us toward the farther room, "women may smile or women may frown, but champagne punch is always pleasant to the taste."

We sampled several varieties of punch, discussed an ice and a surprizing array of small, sweet cakes and sandwiches, then made our adieux to our hostess. Outside, young Arif Pasha was about to enter his taxi when de Grandin tapped him on the shoulder. "We may see more of each other anon, *mon vieux,*" he promised. "It may well be that I shall seek your help."

The Turk met his gaze with a level look of understanding. "I shall be ready when you call," he promised with a nod.

3

DR. DONOVAN held his automatic lighter to de Grandin's cigarette, performed a similar service for me, then snapped down the wick-shield with a click, extinguishing the flame before striking a fresh one for his own smoke. "No use taking unnecessary chances with a three-on-one light, you know," he explained with a sheepish grin. "I don't know whether the same rules that apply to matches govern these gimcracks, but it's better to play safe. Now, about this girl they brought in today:

"It was early this morning—half-past four or so—when a State Constabulary patrol found her wandering around the woods west of Mooreston with nothing but a nightdress on. They questioned her, but could get no information, for most of the time she didn't speak at all, and when she did it was only to slobber some sort of meaningless gibberish. According to Hoyle they should have taken her to the State Hospital for observation, but they're pretty full over there, and prefer to handle only regularly committed cases, so the troopers brought her here and turned her over to the city police.

"Frankly, the case has my goat. Familiar with dementia præcox, are you, Doctor?" he turned questioningly to de Grandin.

"Quite," the Frenchman returned. "I have seen many poor ones suffering from it. Usually it occurs between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, though most cases I have observed were in the early twenties. Wherever I have seen it, the disease was characterized by states of excitement or depression accompanied by delusions of aural or visual type. Most patients believed they were persecuted, or had been through some harrowing experience—occasionally they posed, gesticulated and grimaced."

"Just so." Donovan expelled a cloud of smoke from his nostrils. "You've got it down pat, Doctor. I thought I had, too, but I'm not so sure, now. What would be your diagnosis if a patient displayed every sign of ataxic aphasia, couldn't utter a single intelligent word, then fell into a stupor which lasted the better part of eight hours and woke up with a case of the horrors? This girl's about twenty-three, and absolutely perfect. What's more, her reflexes are all right—knee-jerks normal, very sensitive to pain, and all that, but——" He looked inquiringly at de Grandin.

"H'm; from your statement, I should suggest dementia præcox. It is well known that such dements frequently fall into comatose sleeps in which they suffer nightmares, and on waking are so mentally confused that they can not distinguish between the phantoms of their dreams and their waking surroundings."

"Precisely. Well, I had a talk with this child, heard her story, then gave her a big dose of codein in a glass of milk. She slept three hours with that, and woke up seemingly as normal as you or I, but I'm darned if she didn't repeat the same story, chapter and verse, that she gave me when she first came out of her stupor. I'd say she was sane as a judge if it weren't for this delusion she persists in. Will you come up and have a look at her?"

Donovan's patient lay on the neat, white-iron hospital cot, staring with wide, frightened eyes at the little observation-grille in the unlocked door of her cell. Even the conventional high-necked and long-sleeved muslin bedgown furnished by the hospital could not hide her frail prettiness. With her pale, smooth skin, her light, short hair and big, violet eyes in which lay a look of perpetual terror she was like a little, frightened child, and a wave of sympathy swept over me as we entered the room. That de Grandin felt the same I could tell by the kindly smile he gave her as he

drew a chair to her bedside and seated himself. He took her thin, blue-veined hand in his and patted it gently before placing his finger on her pulse.

"I've brought a couple of gentlemen to see you, Annie," Dr. Donovan announced as the little Frenchman gazed intently at the tiny gold watch strapped to the under side of his wrist, comparing its second-hand with the girl's pulsation. "Dr. de Grandin is a famous French detective as well as a doctor; he'll be glad to hear your story; maybe he can do something about it."

A tortured look swept over the girl's small face as he finished. "You think I'm crazy," she accused, half rising from her pillow. "I know you do, and you've brought these men here to examine me so you can put me in a madhouse for always. Oh, it's dreadful—I'm not insane, I tell you; I'm as sane as you are, if you'd only listen——"

"Now, Annie, don't excite yourself," Donovan soothed. "You know *I* wouldn't do anything like that; I'm your friend, and——"

"My name's not Annie," she interrupted hotly, "and you're *not* my friend. Nobody is. You think I'm crazy—all you doctors think everyone who gets into an asylum must be crazy, and you'll send me to a madhouse and I'll really *go* crazy there!"

"Well, Annie——"

"My name's not Annie, I tell you. Why do you keep calling me that?"

Donovan cast a quick wink in my direction, then turned a serious face to the girl. "I thought your name was Annie," he apologized. "I must have been mistaken. What is it?"

"I've told you it's Trula, Trula Petersen. I used to live in Paterson, but lost my position there and couldn't get anything to do, so I came to Harrisonville looking for work, and——"

"Very good, Friend Donovan," de Grandin announced, relinquishing the girl's wrist but retaining her fingers in his, "when first this young lady came she could not tell her name; now she can. *Bon*, we make progress. Her heart action is strong and good. I think perhaps we shall make much more progress. Now, *Mademoiselle*," he gave the girl one of his quick, friendly smiles, "if you will be so good as to detail your adventures from the start, we shall listen with closest attention. Believe me, we are friends, and nothing you say shall be taken as proof of madness."

The girl gave him a pitiful little smile which was a weak copy of his own. "I *do* believe you, sir," she returned, "and I'll tell you everything, for I know I can trust you.

"When the Clareborne Silk Mills closed down in Paterson I lost my place as timekeeper. Most of the other mills were laying people off, and there was no chance for me to get another situation. I'm an orphan, with no relatives, and I had to get work right away, for I didn't have more than fifty dollars in bank. After trying several places I came to Harrisonville, where nobody knew me, and registered at a domestic servants' agency. It was better to be a housemaid than starve, I thought.

"The very day I registered a Mrs. Afrique came looking for a maid, and picked two other girls and me as possibilities. She looked us all over, asked a lot of questions about our families, where we were born, and that sort of thing, then chose me, because she said she preferred a maid without relatives or friends, who wouldn't be wanting to run out every evening. Her car was waiting outside, and I had no baggage except my suitcase, so I went along with her."

"U'm," de Grandin murmured. "And she took you where?"

"I don't know."

"Eh? How do you say?"

"I don't know, sir. It was a big foreign car with a closed body, and she told me to sit in the tonneau with

her instead of up front with the chauffeur. When we'd started I noticed for the first time that the windows were of frosted glass, and I couldn't see where we went. We must have gone a long way, though, for the car seemed traveling very fast, and there were no traffic stops. When we finally stopped we were under a porte-cochère, and we entered the house directly from the tonneau; so I couldn't get any idea of the surrounding country."

"*Dites!* Surely, in the days that followed, you could look about?" de Grandin persisted.

A look of terror flared in the girl's eyes, and her pale lips writhed in a grimace of hideous fear. "The days that followed!" she echoed with a thin scream; "it's the days that followed that brought me *here!*"

"Ah? Do you say so?" the Frenchman demanded sharply.

"*Now* we're gettin' it!" Donovan whispered in my ear with a low chuckle. "Go ahead and ask her, de Grandin; you tell him, Annie. This is going to be good!"

De Grandin and the girl could not understand his words, but his tone and laugh were obvious. "Oh!" the patient wailed, releasing her hand from de Grandin's and putting it to her eyes. "Oh—you're all making game of me!"

"Be silent, *âne,*" the Frenchman commanded savagely. "*Parbleu,* cleaning the roadways would be work more fitting for you than treating the infirm of mind! Do not mind him, *Mademoiselle.*" He repossessed himself of the girl's fingers and smoothed them gently. "Proceed with your narrative, I pray. *I* shall listen and believe."

For a moment the little patient shook as with an ague, and I could see her grip on the Frenchman's fingers tighten, for the lines of her flexor muscles showed white against the back of her hand. "Please, *please,* believe me, Doctor," she begged. "It's really the truth I'm telling you. They —they wanted—to——"

"Eh, did they so, *parbleu?*" de Grandin replied. "Very good, *Mademoiselle,* you escaped them. No one shall hurt you now, and no one shall persecute you. Jules de Grandin promises it. Now, to proceed."

"I was afraid," she confessed, "terribly afraid from the moment I got in the car with Mrs. Afrique and realized that I couldn't look out the windows. I'd have screamed and tried to jump out, but I was hungry and out of work; besides, she was a big woman, and could have overpowered me without trouble.

"When we got to the house I was still more frightened, and Mrs. Afrique seemed to notice it, for she smiled and took me by the arm. Ugh, her hands were strong as a man's—stronger—and when I tried to draw away she only held me tighter and sort of chuckled deep down in her throat—like a big cat purring when it's caught a mouse! She half led, half shoved me down a long hall which was almost bare of furniture, through a door and down a flight of steps into the basement. The next thing I knew she'd pushed me bodily into a little room, no bigger than this, and locked the door!

"The door was of solid, thick planks, and the only window was a little barred opening almost up to the ceiling, which I couldn't reach even when I pushed the bed over and stood on it. This air-hole let in a little light, but didn't give me any chance to see outside.

"I don't know how long I stayed in that place. At first I thought the window let outdoors, but the light seemed the same strength all the time, so I suppose it really looked out into the main basement and what I at first thought weak sunlight was really reflected from an electric bulb somewhere. At any rate, I determined to fight for my freedom the first chance

I had, for I'd read stories of white-slavers who kidnaped girls, and I was sure I'd fallen into the hands of some such gang. If I only had!

"I don't know how they knew when to do it, but they never opened that door except when I was asleep. I'd lie awake for hours, pretending to be sleeping, so that someone would open the door and give me a chance to die fighting, but nothing ever happened; then the moment I grew so tired that I couldn't keep my eyes open another moment, and really fell asleep, the door would be opened, my soiled dishes taken out and a fresh supply of food brought in. I'd find it there when I woke. The food was good, and plentiful. There was always some sort of meat—veal or young pork, I think it was—and bread and vegetables and a big vacuum bottle of coffee and another of milk. If I hadn't been so terribly frightened, I might have enjoyed it, for I'd been hungry for a long time.

"ONE night I woke with a start. At least I suppose it was night, though there was really no way of telling. I heard voices outside my door, the first I'd heard since I came there. 'Please, please let me go,' a girl was pleading sobbingly. 'I've never done anything to you, and I'll do anything—*anything* you ask, if you'll only let me go!'

"Whoever it was she spoke to answered in a soft, gentle, purring sort of voice, 'Do not be afraid, we seek only to have a little sport with you; then you are free.'

"It was a man who spoke; I could tell that by the heavy voice, and I could hear the girl sobbing and pleading in terror till he took her up the stairs and closed the basement door.

"I didn't know what to think. I'd supposed I was the only prisoner in the house, but now I knew there was at least one other. 'What were they doing to her—what would they do to me when my turn came?' I kept asking myself as I lay there trembling. Presently I heard some heavy thuds on the floor right over my head, as though several people were running about in tennis shoes or bare feet. Then there was a scream, then more running, then more screams. After that everything was still, so still I could hear my heart beating. I lay there trembling, waiting for them to bring her back; but they never did. At last I fell asleep."

Dr. Donovan was chuckling in undisguised amusement, and I began to revise my first impressions. It was only too sadly evident that the poor girl had been through some distressing experience, and that her nerves were badly shaken, but the story she told was so preposterous I was wondering seriously if this were not a case of delusional insanity when de Grandin's sharp comment broke in.

"This Madame Afrique, what did she look like, my child?"

"She was a large woman—tall, that is," the Petersen girl answered. "Big and blond, with queer-looking, brown-green eyes and odd, long nails that turned down over her finger-tips, like claws. She——"

"Name of an intoxicated pig, I was sure, I was certain; now I am positive! They are undoubtlessly one and the same! Stupid me, why did I not recognize it at once?" de Grandin exclaimed. "Say on, my child. Tell us all; I wait with interest."

The girl swallowed twice convulsively, and gave her other hand into de Grandin's keeping. "Hold me, Doctor, hold me tight," she begged. "I'm afraid; terribly afraid, even now.

"I knew something dreadful was going to happen when he finally came for me, but I hadn't a thought how terrible it would be. It must have been three days later, judging by the number of times my food had been replenished, that he came for me. I was sound asleep when I felt someone shaking me roughly by the shoulder.

'Get up,' I was told; 'we're going to let you go—if you can.'

"I tried to ask questions, to get him to wait till I put on some clothes, but he fairly dragged me, just as I was, from the bed. When I got upstairs I found myself in a big, bare room, brightly lighted by a ceiling electric fixture, and with only a few articles of furniture in it—one or two big chairs, several small footstools and a big couch set diagonally across one corner. It was night; I could see the rain beating against the window-pane and hear the wind blowing outside. In the sudden, unaccustomed light I saw a tall old man, with scant white hair and big white mustache and queer, greenish eyes, held me by the shoulder. He was dressed in a sort of bathrobe or gown of some dark-colored stuff and his feet were bare. Then I saw the woman, Mrs. Afrique. She was in a sort of short nightgown, one that reached only to her knees, and, like the man, she, too, was barefooted.

"He shoved me to the middle of the room, and all the time the woman stood there smiling and eyeing me *hungrily*.

" 'My wife and I have a little game we sometimes play with our guests,' the old man told me. 'We turn out the lights and enjoy a little romp of tag. If the guest can get away in the darkness, she is free to do so; if she can not——' He stopped and smiled at me—the cruelest smile I've ever seen.

" 'Wh—what happens if she can not?' I faltered.

"He put out his hand and stroked my bare arm. 'Very nice,' he murmured, 'nice and tender, eh?' The woman nodded and licked her red lips with the tip of her red tongue, and her queer green eyes seemed to shine as she looked at me.

" 'If the guest can not get away,' the man answered with a dreadful, low laugh, then looked at the woman again. 'You've eaten well since you came here,' he went on, apparently forgetting what he'd started to say; 'how did you like the meat we served?'

"I nodded; I didn't know what to say. Then: 'Why, it was very nice,' I answered, fearing to anger him if I kept silent.

" 'Ye-es,' he agreed with another laugh. 'Very nice; very nice, indeed. That meat, dear, tender young lady—that meat was the guests who couldn't get away!'

"I closed my eyes and thought hard. This couldn't be true, I told myself. This was just some dreadful dream; such things couldn't happen in Twentieth Century New Jersey.

"It was a lucky thing for me I did close my eyes, for while I stood there swaying with nauseated horror I heard a faint click. Instantly I opened my eyes to find the light had been shut off and I was standing alone in the center of the great room."

"How did you know you were alone if the light had been shut off? The room was pitch-dark, wasn't it?" Dr. Donovan demanded.

The girl never turned her head. Her terrified eyes remained steadily, pleadingly, on de Grandin's face as she answered in a choked whisper:

"*By their eyes!*

"The woman stood at one end of the room, the man had moved silently to the other, and in the darkness I could see their eyes, like the phosphorescent, green orbs of wild jungle-beasts at night. The steady, green-gleaming eyes came slowly nearer and nearer, sometimes straight, sometimes circling in the darkness, but never for an instant did they turn from me. I was being stalked like a mouse by hungry cats—the creatures could see in the dark!

"I said a moment ago it was fortunate for me I'd closed my eyes. That's all that saved me. If they'd been open when the lights went out, I'd have been completely blinded by the resulting blackness, but, as it was,

when I opened them the room was just a little lighter than the absolute darkness of closed eyes. The result was I could see their bodies like moving blotches of shadow slightly heavier than that of the rest of the room, and could even make out the shapes of some of the furniture. I could see the dull-gray of the rain-washed window, too.

"As I turned in terror from one creeping shadow-thing to the other, the female let out a low, dreadful wailing cry, like the gradually growing miaul of a hunting cat, only deeper and louder. The he-thing answered it, and it seemed to me there was an undertone of fiendish, half-human laughter in the horrible caterwaul.

"It seemed to me all the forces of hell were let loose in that great, dark room. I heard myself screaming, praying, shrieking curses and obscenities I'd never realized I even knew, and answering me came the wild, inhuman screeches of the two glowing-eyed things that hunted me.

"Without realizing what I did, I snatched up a heavy footstool and hurled it at the nearer pair of eyes. They say a woman can't throw straight, but my shot took effect. I saw the blurred outline of a body double up with an agonized howl and go crashing to the floor, where it flopped and contorted like a fish jerked from the water.

"With a shrill, ear-splitting scream the other thing was on me, and I dodged to my knees just in time to avoid the threshing blow it aimed at me—I felt my flimsy nightdress rip to tatters as her long, sharp nails tore through it.

"I rolled over and over across the floor with that she-devil leaping and springing after me. I snatched at another hassock as I rolled, and flung it behind me. It tripped her, and for a moment she went to her knees, but her short dress offered no hindrance to her movements, and she was up and after me, howling and screaming like a beast, in another second.

"I'd managed to roll somewhat nearer the window, and as I came in contact with another stool I grasped it and hurled it with all my might at the panes. They shattered outward with a crash and I dived through the opening. The ground was scarcely six feet below, and the rain had softened it so that it broke my fall almost like a mattress. An instant after I'd struck the soft, rain-soaked lawn, I was on my feet and running as no woman ever ran before."

"Yes, and then——?" de Grandin prompted softly.

The girl shook her slim, muslin-clad shoulders and shuddered like one waking from a fearsome dream. "That's all there is," she stated simply. "The next thing I knew I was waking in this bed and Dr. Donovan was asking me about myself."

"THAT'S letter perfect," Donovan commented. "Exactly the way she told it twice before. What do you make of it?"

"Make of it?" de Grandin echoed, almost wonderingly. "Beard of a blue mouse, what can one make of the truth more than that which it is already? Yes. *C'est la vérité* she speaks, beyond a doubt, my friends. I damn think our beauteous Madame Bera and her so detestably ugly spouse have overreached themselves. There is no doubt they and the Afriques are the same couple. Why should they not choose that name as a *nom de ruse;* are they not of Tunis, and is not Tunis in Africa? But yes."

"Holy smoke!" Donovan emitted a low whistle. "You don't mean you actually *believe* all this bunk?"

"*Mais certainement,*" de Grandin replied. "So firmly do I believe it that I am willing to stand sponsor for this young lady immediately if you will release her on parole to accompany Friend Trowbridge and me."

"We-ll, I'll be—oh, all right; it's your funeral, if you want to take the responsibility. Want to go with these gentlemen, Annie?" He regarded the girl with a questioning smile.

"Yes! I'll go anywhere with him; he trusts me," she returned; then, as an afterthought, "And my name's not Annie."

"All right, Annie, get your clothes on; we'll be waiting for you in the office," Donovan replied with a grin as he led the way from her cell.

Almost before we had entered the hospital office de Grandin was at the telephone, calling Police Headquarters. "I would that you give this message to Sergeant Costello immediately he arrives; it is Dr. de Grandin who speaks," he called when his connection was put through. "Request that he ascertain the address given by Monsieur and Madame Afrique when they went to secure domestic help from Osgood's Employment Agency; ascertain, if possible, the names and addresses of all young women who entered their employ from the agency, and have him take steps to locate them at once, if he can.

"*Très bon,*" he nodded as the Petersen girl made her appearance, "you are in good time, my child. Come, let us depart."

IT WAS something after four o'clock the following afternoon when Detective Sergeant Costello rang up. "I got some o' th' dope ye wuz after wantin', Dr. de Grandin, sor," he announced. "Th' Africays hired four gur-rls from Osgood's about a week apart; didn't seem to find anny of 'em satisfactory, sor."

"Ah, and the young women are now where?" the Frenchman demanded eagerly.

"None of 'em's been located as yet, sor. It so happens they wuz all strangers in town, or at least didn't have anny folks here, an' all of 'em wuz livin' in furnished rooms at th' time they wuz hired. None of 'em has reported back to her roomin'-house or applied to Osgood's for re-employment. We'll look round for 'em a bit more, if ye say so, sor, though I don't think 'twill do much good. They're mostly fly-by-night, them gur-rls, ye know."

"You say truly, *mon ami,*" the Frenchman muttered. "*Hélas,* their poor spirit have flown by night long since, I fear." Then:

"And the address given by Monsieur and Madame Ber—Afrique; could the agency supply that?"

"Sure they could, sor; 'twas 762 Orient Bullyvard."

"Ah? *Bon;* I shall go there and——"

"Needn't be troublin' yerself, sor. I've been there already."

"*Ah bah;* I fear you have spoiled it. I did not wish them to suspect we knew. Now, I much fear——"

"Ye needn't sor; 762 Orient Bullyvard is a vacant lot."

"Hell and ten thousand furies! Do you tell me?"

"I sure do, sor; but here's sumpin solid for us to sink our teeth into. I think I've uncovered a lead on th' Calebson case."

"Indeed?"

"Well, 'tain't much, sor, but it's more than we knew before. He wuzn't alone when he died; leastwise, he wuzn't alone a few minutes before. I run across a pair o' young fellies that seen 'im takin' a lady into his coupé on th' Albemarle Pike just a little way outside Mooreston late th' night before they found 'im dead wid his car jammed up agin a tree."

"*Chapeau d'un bouc,* is it so? And have you a description of the lady of mystery?"

"Kind o'; yes, sor. She wuz a big gur-rl, wrapped in some sort o' long cloak, an' didn't have no hat on. They place that be th' fact that they seen her hair in th' light from th' car's lamps, sor. It wuz light blond, sor."

The little Frenchman set down the 'phone, and his small blue eyes were sparkling with a light as cold and hard as polar ice reflecting the aurora borealis. "My child," he exclaimed, seizing both Trula Petersen's slender hands in his, "*le bon Dieu* has been very good to you. He has delivered those who hunted and harried you like a brute beast into the hands of Jules de Grandin."

"What are you going to do?" I asked, wondering.

"Do?" his waxed mustache quivered like the whiskers of an irritable tom-cat. "Do? *Parbleu*, am I one to slap the face of Providence? *Mille nons.* I shall serve them as they deserve, no less. May Satan fry me in a skillet if I do not!"

A moment later he was thumbing through the telephone directory. "Ah, Madame Heacote," he announced when that lady finally answered his urgent call, "I am unhappy, I am miserable; I am altogether desolate! At your so charming reception I met that delightful Monsieur and Madame Bera, and we discovered many friends in common. Of the goodness of their heart they invited me to call, and I made careful note of their address. Now, *hélas*, like a great stupid-head, I have misplaced it. Can you—ah, a million thousand thanks!

"*Triomphe!*" he cried a moment later, turning from the 'phone. "It is even as I suspected. They are clever, but Jules de Grandin is cleverer. Yes. They dwell near Mooreston; their house abuts the Albemarle Pike. To find them will be a small task.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, I pray you have the capable Nora McGinnis, that queen among cooks, prepare us a noble dinner this night. There is much to be done, and I would do it with a full stomach. Meantime, I call that Monsieur Arif and bid him hasten to us. It was he who first roused my suspicions; he deserves to be present when it is finished. Yes, assuredly."

4

SHORTLY before dinner de Grandin returned from the errand which had occupied his entire afternoon, a bulky brown-paper parcel clutched tightly under each arm. For half an hour or more he was busily engaged in some secret business in his room, and, though I was fairly bursting with the pressure of a hundred questions, he gave me no opportunity to satisfy my curiosity during dinner.

Instead he kept up a running fire of conversation, most of it witty, all of it inconsequential. Stories of student life at the Sorbonne, droll tales of the War, anecdotes of his travels in the far places of the world—anything but the slightest reference to the mystery of Monsieur and Madame Bera he rattled off like a wound-up phonograph.

Finally, when coffee was served in the drawing-room, he lighted a cigar, stretched his slender, patent-leather-shod feet toward the blazing logs in the fireplace and regarded Trula Petersen and me in turn with his quick, bird-like glance. "You trust me, *ma petite?*" he suddenly asked the girl.

"Oh, yes."

"*Très bon;* we shall put that trust to the test before long." He smiled whimsically, then:

"You have never hunted the tiger in India, I assume?"

"Sir? No! I've never been anywhere except Norway, where I was born, and this country, where I've lived since I was ten."

"Excellent. I see I must enlighten you. In India, when they would bring the striped one within gunshot, they tether a little, so helpless kid to a stake. The tiger scents a meal, approaches the small goat; the white man, waiting, gun in hand, squeezes his trigger and—*voilà.* A tigerskin rug for some pretty lady's boudoir. It is all very simple."

"I—I don't think I understand, sir," the girl faltered, but there was a

telltale widening of her eyes and a constriction of the muscles of her throat as she spoke.

"Very well. Permit that I explain in detail. Anon our good friend, Arif Pasha, will come. When all is ready you will assume the same costume you wore when they brought you to the hospital, and over it you will put warm wrappings. Thereafter Friend Trowbridge will drive us to Monsieur Bera's house and you will descend, clad as you were when you fled. Across the lawn you will stagger, calling for help. Unless I am more mistaken than I think, one or both of them will sally forth to see who cries for help in the night. Then——"

"O-o-oh, *no!*" the girl wailed in a stifled voice. "I couldn't do that; I wouldn't go there for all the money in——"

"*Zut!* Who speaks of money? This is a thing I would have you do for humanity's sake, my child. Consider: Did not you tell me you woke one night in your prison cell to hear Bera the Monster leading another girl to torture and to death? Did you not thereafter hear the stamping of feet which fled and feet which pursued, and the agonized scream of one who was caught?"

The girl nodded dumbly.

"Very good. Suppose I now tell you four girls were hired by these beast-people from the same agency whence you went to their service. That much we know; it is a matter of police record. It is also a matter of record that none of them, save you, has ever since been seen. How many other unfortunate ones went the same sad road is a matter of conjecture, but unless you are willing to do this thing for me those we seek may escape. They may move to some other place and play their so infernal games of hide-and-seek-in-the-dark with only the good God knows how many other poor ones.

"Attend me further, little pretty one: The night you escaped by what was no less than a miracle of the blessed saints, a young man named Thomas Calebson—a youth of good family and position—young, attractive, in love, with everything to live for, drove his coupé through Mooreston along the Albemarle Pike toward this city, where he lived. A short distance from Mooreston he was hailed by a woman, a big blond woman, *who sought for something in the roadside woods.*

"In the kindness of his heart he offered the woman a ride to Harrisonville. Next morning his motor car was found in collision with a wayside tree. The windshield was smashed to fragments—I myself saw it—and through the broken glass the young man's head protruded. His throat was severed; he was dead. *But nowhere was there any blood.* Neither on the car nor on his clothing was there stain, yet he had bled to death. Also, I who am at once a physician and an observer of facts, examined his poor, severed throat. Such tears as marred his flesh might have been made by teeth, perchance by claws; by broken glass, never. The pig-ignorant jury of the coroner returned a verdict of death by accident, but Sergeant Costello of the *gendarmerie* and I know better.

"What happened in that young man's car we do not certainly know, but we can surmise much. We suspect, by example, that a thing which dotes on human flesh and blood, a foul thing made after the semblance of a woman, had whetted its appetite for a feast, then been disappointed in the moment of expectation. From her lair she rushed forth in search of her escaped prey, but her search was vain. Along comes this unsuspecting young man. Into his car the she-fiend gets. They ride together for a time. They arrive at a lonely spot where road and woodland and swamp come together. There is a sudden shrill, inhuman scream, the glare of green beast-eyes in the dark, the stifling weight of a body,

hurled on unsuspecting shoulders and the rending of shrinking flesh by bestial teeth and claws. The car is stopped, then started; it is run forcibly against a tree; a head, already almost severed from its body, is thrust through the broken windshield and—the nameless horror which wears the guise of woman returns to its den, its lips red from the feast, its gorge replenished."

"De Grandin!" I expostulated. "You're raving. Such things can't be!"

"Ha, can they not, *parbleu?*" He tweaked the ends of his diminutive blond mustache, gazing pensively at the fire a moment, then:

"Regard me, my friend; listen, pay attention: Where, if you please, is Tunis?"

"In northwest Africa."

"*Précisément.* And Egypt is where, if you please?"

"In Africa, of course, but——"

"But me no buts, good friend. Both lie on the same dark continent, that dark mother of darksome mysteries whose veil no man has ever completely lifted. Now, attend me: In lower Egypt, near Zagazig, are the great ruins of Tell Besta. They mark the site of the ancient, wicked city of Bubastis, own sister to Sodom and Gomorrah of accursed memory. It was there, in the days of the third Rameses, thirteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, that men and women worshiped the cat-headed one, she who was called Ubasti, sometimes known as Bast. Yes. With phallic emblems and obscenities which would shock present-day Montmartre, they worshiped her. Today her temples lie in ruins, and only the hardest stones of her many monuments endure.

"Ha, but there are things more enduring than granite and brass, my friend. The olden legends tell us of a race apart, a race descended from the loins of this cat-headed one of Bubastis, who shared her evil, feline nature, even though they wore the outward semblance of women and of men. The fellaheen of Egypt are poor, wretchedly poor, and what the bare necessities of living do not snatch from them the tax collector does; yet not for all the English gold that clinks and jingles at Shepard's Hotel in Cairo could one bribe a fellah to venture into the ruins of Tell Besta after sunset. No, it is a fact; I myself have seen it.

"*Pourquoi?* Because, my friend, *that cursed spot is ghoul-haunted.* Do not laugh, it is no laughing matter; it is so.

"The ancient gods are dust, and dust are all their worshipers, but their memory and their evil live after them. The fellaheen will tell you of strange, terrible things which dwell amid the ruins near Zagazig, things formed like human creatures, but which are, as your own so magnificent Monsieur Poe has said, neither man nor woman, nor brute nor human—they are ghouls. Yes, certainly. Like a man or like a woman their faces are, so too are their bodies, to some extent; but they see in the dark like her from whom they are whelped, they wear long nails to seize their prey and have beast-teeth to tear it, and of the flesh and blood of living men—or dead, if the live be not available—they make their food and drink.

"Not only at Tell Besta are they found, for they are quick to multiply, and their numbers have spread. In the ruined tombs of all northern Africa they make their lairs, awaiting the coming of the unwary traveler. Mostly they are nocturnal, but they have been known to spring on the lone voyager by day, as well. The Arabs hate them as a man may hate a serpent, but they fear them also, and speak of them by indirection. 'That people,' they call them, nor does one who has traveled in Arabia need ask a second time what the term connotes.

"Very good. When our friend Arif Pasha first showed fright, like a

restive horse in the presence of hidden danger, at sight of those we know as Monsieur and Madame Bera, I was astonished. Such things might be in darker Africa, in Persia, perhaps in Asiatic Turkey, I told me, but in America—New Jersey—*non!*

"However, Jules de Grandin has the open mind. I made it a duty to meet this so strange couple; I observed their queer, cat-like eyes, I noticed the odd, claw-like nails of their hands, but most of all I watched the white, gleaming teeth and the carmine lips of them, and listened to the soft, purring intonation of their words.

"'These folk are most queer,' I tell me. 'They are not like others.'

"That very night we visited the City Hospital and listened to our little Trula tell her fearsome story. What she had to say of those who hired her and would have hunted her to death convinced me of much I should otherwise not have believed.

"Came then Sergeant Costello's report of the four girls hired by this Madame Afrique, whom now we know to be Madame Bera—girls who did not return to their former haunts, though they had lost their service places. Then comes the information of the strange woman who rode with the unfortunate young Calebson the night he met death.

"'Jules de Grandin,' I tell me, 'your dear America are invaded. The land which came so gallantly to the aid of *la belle France* in her extremity has been entered by unclean monsters, by night-seeing things which slay her citizens and citizenesses and batten on their flesh.'

"'Yes, it are undoubtlessly so,' I answer.

"'Very well, Jules de Grandin,' I ask me, 'what are you to do about it?'

"'*Mordieu,*' I tell me, 'I shall exterminate the invaders.'

"'*Bravo,* it are agreed.'

"Now, all is prepared. Mademoiselle Trula, my little pretty one, my little half orange, I need your help. Will not you do this thing for me?"

"I—I'm dreadfully frightened," the girl stammered, "but, I—I'll do it, sir."

"Bravely spoken, my pigeon. Do not fear; your guardian angels are with you. Jules de Grandin will also be there.

"Come, let us make ready. The doorbell sounds; it are undoubtlessly Friend Arif, perhaps another, also. Let us proceed."

5

ARIF PASHA was not alone. In strange contrast to the slim, dark and elegant Turkish cosmopolite, Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello heaved his six feet four of red-headed, blue-eyed Irish bulk into the drawing-room, grinning rather sheepishly at de Grandin. "Sure, 'tis meself don't know what it's all about, Dr. de Grandin, sor," he admitted as he accepted the chair the little Frenchman indicated, "but when this here gentleman stopped by headquarters an' told me ye were after wantin' me to go find th' murderer o' th' pore young Calebson felly, I didn't stop to ask no fool questions."

"That is well," de Grandin replied. "This night, unless I am more mistaken than I think, I shall show you that which killed the poor young man."

"What's that, sor?" the detective asked. "Wuz ye after sayin' 'that'? Ain't it a person, then? Sure, ye're not goin' to tell me 'twuz an accident, after all?"

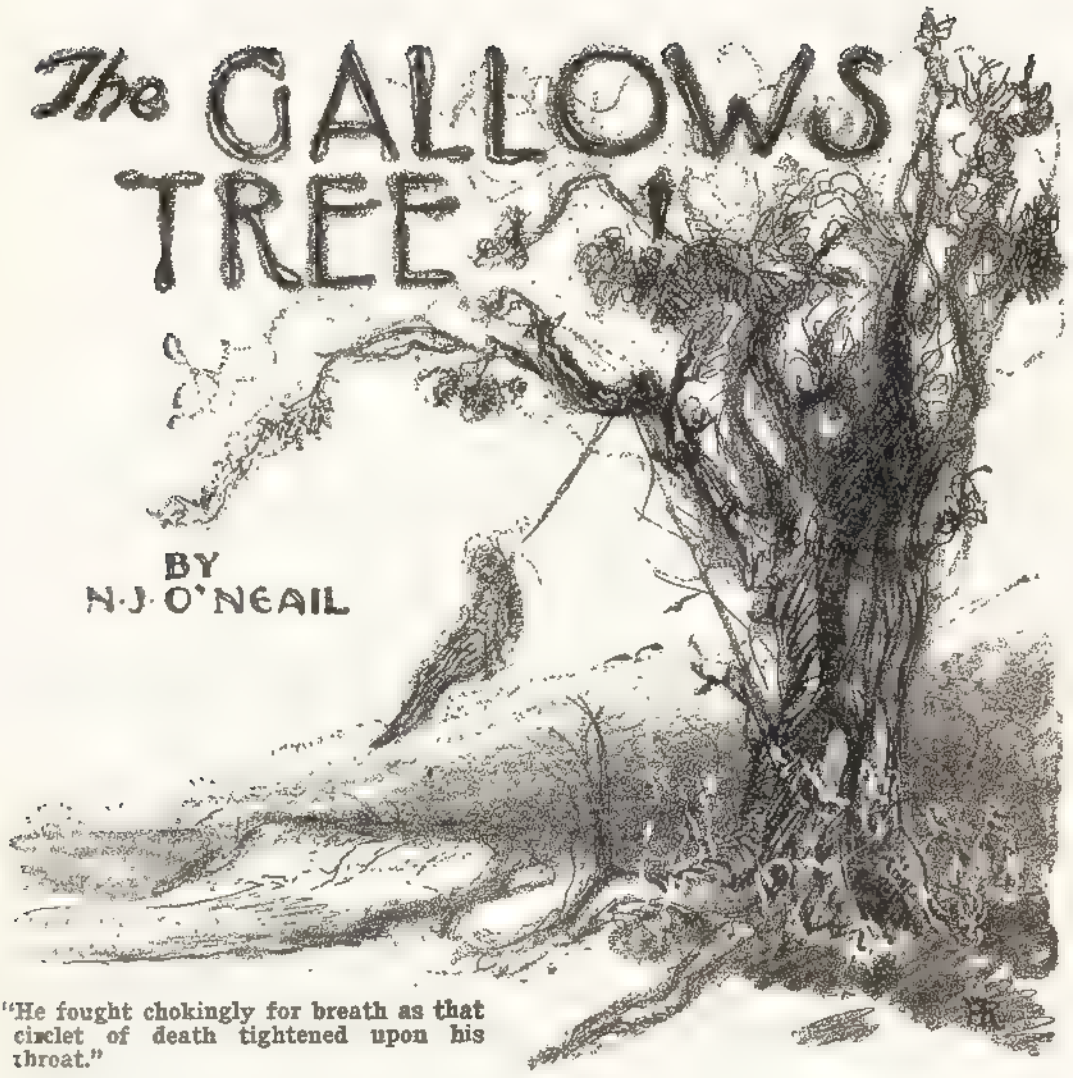
"Let us not quibble over pronouns, my old one," de Grandin replied with a smile. "Wait until you have seen; then say whether or not the thing from hell be man, woman, beast or fiend. Come, we waste time here."

Led by de Grandin as ceremoniously as though he were escorting her to the dancing-floor, Trula Petersen ascended the stairs to don the ragged

(Continued on page 855)

The GALLOWS TREE

BY
N. J. O'NEAIL



"He fought chokingly for breath as that circlet of death tightened upon his throat."

AUTHOR'S Foreword:—In presenting to the public for the first time the following extracts from the diary of Joseph Worth, the present writer does not venture any expression of opinion upon that unusual document, or upon its still more unusual sequel.

If the diary is accepted as genuine, its implications, in the light of what ensued, are almost incredible to Twentieth Century minds. But, on the other hand, if it is dismissed as a hoax, or as the product of a deranged imagination, the sequel must appear in the light of an even more incredible and inexplicable coincidence.

The only known facts concerning the case appear in the extract from The Bodmin Chronicle, *which is appended at the close of Worth's own narrative.*

POLGARTH, APRIL 6, 1929:—What strange spell binds me to this preposterous place called Polgarth, which is scarcely a dot on the hinterland of Cornwall, I do not know, save that the six days which I have spent here have wrought in me a sensation of content-

ment and tranquillity such as I have not known in years of wandering over the surface of the globe.

There is no beauty in the spot; it is almost repellently bleak; and yet, for the first time within my memory, the wanderlust which has burned within me appears to be at rest. Perhaps it is the very bleakness of the region which attracts me, for in all my odyssey, scenic splendor has never been my quest.

Perhaps, in truth, there has been no quest in my ramblings; for I have sought to find nothing; rather I have sought to lose something—and that something, myself.

I have fled in dismay from the most cosmopolitan centers of the new and old worlds alike, yearning for seclusion; and in the forests, the deserts, the mountains of four continents I have cried aloud for distraction and companionship. Yet here, in this lonely Cornish nook, which is neither metropolis nor absolute wilderness, I feel, unaccountably, as though I had come home.

There may be some atavistic explanation of it, for I know that my forefathers were English, three centuries ago; and they may well have come from Cornwall, since I remember a vague tradition that our surname was once Trewartha, which has surely a Cornish savor; although for generations it has been shortened to the form Worth.

And perhaps, if atavism enters into it, that, too, may account for the fascination which that tree holds for me; for farther back in the mists of time. not three, but eighteen, centuries ago, who knows what homage my tree-worshiping ancestors may have offered before some such woodland god?

I had no thought of this in mind when I first wandered into this corner of England; indeed, I can not say what impulse or whim of chance led my vagrant footsteps hither, unless it was the craving for a new and strange environment. And my present peaceful mood is probably but transient; another week will find me racked once more with the old agony of unrest which has tortured my soul for more years than I can remember.

But at least, for the moment, I am at peace here—in a tiny settlement, which is scarcely a hamlet, and certainly far from a village; a ramshackle old inn where I am dwelling; a dozen scattered cottages, and for the rest, a region of rolling moorland, the monotony of which is broken only by an occasional straggling tree.

For the most part, they are just that—occasional straggling trees. But there is one exception, to which I have alluded, and which lingers within my mind as though I had spent a lifetime beneath its boughs, as though my very cradle had been suspended from them.

Heavens, what a tree is that gigantic oak, which stands alone upon the moor, it may be a mile and a half from this spot! A monstrous, towering growth, gnarled with the age, not of years, but of centuries, it must have been old when Shakespeare was young; it may have been in its prime when John signed the Charter at Runnymede.

It stands alone, towering high above the stunted landscape, like a Brobdingnagian in Lilliput. It would be striking, amid a myriad giants of its kind, in the heart of Sherwood forest. Here, it seems to dominate the entire countryside, not merely by its physical magnitude, but by its majestic, aloof, almost contemptuous detachment, as it stands, as though brooding over a past rooted centuries deep in history.

I first chanced upon it three nights ago, when strolling in the faint light of a moon which seemed as barren as all else in this barren area; a light so faint that even the spreading bulk of the tree itself cast no shadow. The moon is even fainter tonight; other-

wise I might almost see the tree from my window.

APRIL 8:—It is unaccountable, the atmosphere of isolation which surrounds that tree. I strolled past it again last night, and as I paused beneath the tangled canopy woven by its branches, far overhead, I seemed almost to step from the world of everyday into another realm—a realm of the unknown, at once perilous and alluring. I could almost have believed that the ground whereon I stood was hallowed—or unhallowed—to some spirit of the past. In such an aura, before such a tree, I could easily conjure up a vision of ancient Druidical rites and unnamable sacrifices. What tricks the human mind can play upon itself, once given scope!

Tonight, the moon is still pallid; but it seems that I can faintly discern that gigantic bulk on the distant moorland. Perhaps, if the light grows stronger later, I shall see it more clearly.

APRIL 10:—I was not mistaken in my earlier fancies; there is a definite, almost tangible fascination about that tree. For the last forty-eight hours I seem to have lain under its spell, my thoughts permeated by its overpowering presence. I seemed to feel it beckoning to me; yet I deliberately refrained from revisiting it until tonight, in order to taste to the full the piquant sensation of anticipation.

And tonight I sat for almost an hour beneath its fantastically sprawling limbs. Strange, that an inanimate object should have power to cast such a spell over one! Although a tree, in a sense, is not inanimate; particularly such a tree. Indeed, contrasted with it, man himself seems a puny creature; not alone in stature, but in the light of the countless human generations that such a titan of nature has seen run out their brief span of life.

If the superstitions of the dark ages still survived today, one might well conceive of such a living pillar, rooted in the depths of the nether-world, and extended upward, half-way to heaven.

A fantastic fancy, of course; why my thoughts should flow along such channels, I do not know; but tonight, as I sat beneath that monstrous bole, it almost seemed that its leaves, rustling far overhead, whispered to me of things beyond the ken of human mind, the sight of human eye; of thoughts and deeds weird, unnamable, yet overpoweringly alluring.

I am sure that from my window I can distinguish the outline of the tree—as dim as though it were a phantom figure upon a phantom moor. I can almost hear the whispering of its leaves—but that, of course, is stark imagination.

APRIL 11:—I should not have believed it possible, a week ago, that an obsession could so grip a human mind. My thoughts seem to twine as instinctively around The Tree—for it has become that to me—as does the mistletoe around another of its species.

I dreamed of it, last night; or rather, it formed the background of my dream, just as it does for almost every thought of my waking moments. Strangely enough, I have seldom known a dream of such intensity, and yet already its details are fading from my mind, and only the grim outline remains.

I found myself garbed in quaint, fantastic garments, which must, I believe, have been those of the Restoration or of the early Georgian period. Mounted on horseback, with a pistol in each hand, I was in hiding, it seemed, in a thicket; and as I listened for sounds of my pursuers, a welter of foul and furious emotions raged within my breast.

Pursuit came; I fled, but was overtaken, and torn from my mount by a

score of dream hands. And then The Tree limned itself upon my consciousness. I was being dragged toward it, and such a pall of horror as in my waking moments I can scarcely conceive, fell over me. I shudder even now, in the sane light of day, at the vague recollection of the dark and blasphemous thoughts which coursed madly through the channels of my brain and seemed to sear my very soul.

The Tree was drawing nearer, and every second the shroud of black terror enveloped me more closely, and the tempest of unholy frenzy set me quivering as from the palsy, in my unseen captors' grasp. And then, suddenly, I awoke——

A beam of moonlight fell athwart my bed, and through the open window, in the remote distance I beheld the shadowy silhouette of The Tree, its branches stirring tortuously in the night breeze—whispering, still whispering, it seemed.

Curious, what tricks the light of day can play! As I sit writing this, shortly before noon, I can not distinguish The Tree upon the moor. It is probably because the sunlight dazzles my eyes. I have never yet beheld The Tree by daylight. I shall, this afternoon, to test whether its spell is as potent as by night.

APRIL 12:—Merciful heavens, are the days of witchcraft not yet extinct?

I am so shaken by my experience of yesterday afternoon that I can scarcely yet marshal my fevered thoughts to place them upon paper. Either I am the victim of a delusion more incredible than ever conceived in the pages of fiction, or some accursed black magic stalks the moors of Cornwall in the Twentieth Century.

Yesterday afternoon I set out from the inn to survey The Tree by daylight. It stood, I recalled, about a mile and a half distant, at the first crossroad one encountered to the east—half an hour's walk; but the road so rambles and twists that The Tree is unlikely to be visible until one is close upon it; although, as I have said, it can be seen in a direct line from my window on a cloudless night.

I covered the distance leisurely, grappling in my mind with the incredible spell which the thing appears to have cast over me. And then, as I reached the crossroads, a chill of incredulous amazement, almost of consternation, gripped me.

For The Tree was not there!

The moor rolled east and west and south, broken only by a few patches of scrubby brush. The Tree had vanished as though obliterated by a giant hand. It was not merely that it had been leveled by ax or saw, or uprooted by some cataclysm of nature; the earth whereon it had stood was as smooth, and level, and unbroken, as though for centuries; The Tree itself had simply been wiped out of existence, if indeed it had ever existed.

Then indeed, for a moment, my brain reeled and tottered on the brink of chaotic madness. Such a thing was unthinkable—and yet, it was the truth!

As I stood, numbed with bewilderment, a possible explanation suggested itself. Could I have mistaken the spot? But a moment's reflection convinced me of the futility of that theory. I knew the spot all too well. Four times before had I visited it, the first by chance, the other three by design. Here, in the angle formed by the roadway which I had followed, and a transverse path across the moor, The Tree had stood; and now the spot was as smooth and level as the turf beneath a tennis roller.

No, there could be no mistaking the location, for there was not another transverse path within a mile; and, moreover, from this point I could discern in the distance the inn, and my own window, through which I had

more than once gazed upon the blurred outline of The Tree.

As the incredible, inexplicable realization seeped slowly through my reluctant brain, I observed an aged peasant approaching, and accosted him—cautiously, for I was not prepared to expose what must seem my madness to the world.

"Can you tell me," I asked, "what has become of the great oak which once grew here?"

He surveyed me with incurious, yet non-understanding eyes.

"There don't belong to be no oak tree, nor no other tree there, sir, nor ever was, as I remember," he answered.

"Surely I can not be mistaken," I pressed him. "I visited this place once, in the past, and I seem to recall a large tree growing here."

"Not in the seventy years that I belong to live in these parts, sir," he insisted.

With a word of apology, and a muttered explanation that I must have mistaken my direction, I left him, and for hours paced the moor in a vain attempt to fathom the riddle.

Vain, indeed, for to one of two conclusions I must come: either I had suffered a delusion when I saw The Tree, or I suffered one now, when I could not see it. But the peasant's assurance dispelled the latter possibility, and drove me inevitably to a realization that for the last week I must have labored under some incredible hypnotic spell.

I have looked from my window tonight, half expecting to see once more the nebulous blur of The Tree that is not, and can never have been, a tree. But the sky is overcast with an ominous cloud-pall, and naught is visible on the distant moor. And yet—merciful heaven, am I indeed on the verge of madness? I seem even now to hear the phantom rustling of those leaves that can have no existence save in the disorder of my brain.

APRIL 13:—Beyond all question, there is some deviltry afoot upon these accursed Cornish moors; some intangible, fiendish force, which works its malevolent purpose through that Tree of hell, spawned up from the very inferno itself.

And yet, after what I passed through last night, after that ordeal which has left me racked, not alone with physical pain, but with incredible and agonizing terror of mind and soul, should I call it an intangible force? I do not know; I only know that at this moment I stand at the border of a land of unseen, unthinkable horrors, from which phantom hands stretch forth to clutch me, and drag me into their unhallowed depths.

Tonight I shall sleep—if indeed I sleep at all—behind bolted doors and windows; though I doubt whether such puny artifices can avail against the forces of evil which have apparently beset me. And tomorow I shall flee from Cornwall forever. I have had enough of wandering for one lifetime; henceforth, any spot which is sufficiently far removed from this fiend's pest-hole is a welcome home to me.

Even in this diary, which no other eye than mine shall ever scan, I scarcely dare to set down the thing that befell me last night; for even now it almost drives me to question my own sanity. Have I, who ever scoffed at the supernatural, fallen beneath the thrall of sorcery as black as ever flourished in ancient Thebes or in the darkest mediæval era?

Or will mental obsession, auto-hypnosis and somnambulism explain away my ordeal? No—a thousand times no, as I still feel that rasping knot of death upon my throat, and behold the gigantic shape of that hell-tree, rearing itself from the very pit of perdition.

I dreamed again last night—and yet, I scarcely dare say what I dreamed, and what was soul-chilling reality, so hectically are the two in-

terwoven in a dread pattern of occult horror.

At least, however, my dream began as did that of three nights ago. Again, attired in the garb of bygone centuries, armed and mounted, I fled from I know not what pursuit. Again I was overpowered by that horde of dream figures, and again borne across the moor, toward that appalling Tree, whose sinister secret I had not fully grasped before. Again my brain seemed to quail beneath the storm of inchoate fury that seethed within me, as I struggled madly against the horror yet to come.

Now I stood beneath The Tree, and my welter of volcanic madness gave way to a cold stark despair, and to a hell-born hatred, as I felt my hands being bound behind my back, and a noose twining snake-like about my neck.

Another moment and the earth receded from beneath my feet, I dangled in midair, and fought chokingly for breath as that circlet of death tightened ruthlessly upon my throat. A haze of black oblivion reeled before my staring eyes, and then——

It must, I think, have been at that point that my dream broke off, and grim reality succeeded it, for of a sudden the noose had vanished from about my throat, and in the reaction, I lay in a sobbing, gasping frenzy.

And then came the crowning horror of reality, to climax and eclipse the horror of my dream. As the chill night wind slowly fanned the fever from my brow, I raised my head, and——

Merciful heavens!

I lay, not in my bed in the inn, but upon the very moor, at that very spot, at the crossroads, and—what diabolical enchantment lay at the bottom of it, I know not—beside me that accursed Tree of hell once more had reared itself, and in the moonless murk of night it seemed to spread until it enveloped the earth with a miasma of dreadful omen.

At the realization of where I was and what I saw, I screamed aloud, and then I must have swooned; for when I next opened my eyes, sunlight was streaming over the moors, and that appalling, towering shape had vanished like a noxious mist of night.

Somehow—I do not recall how—I must have reeled or staggered, like a sobbing, gibbering madman, home to the inn; for I remember gaining the shelter of my room, and then collapsing once more, a quivering, soul-shaken, human shell.

Not all the gold of the Indies could tempt me to spend another twenty-four hours in this region of devildom. Had I the strength, I should flee from the spot ere nightfall, but in my shaken condition I can not start until morning. But tonight I shall sleep with doors and windows bolted, and with a loaded revolver within reach of my hand. And, more, I shall tie myself to my bed.

That may be a vain precaution; for, gladly though I would believe it, I know in my heart of hearts that it was not mere somnambulism that led me to the moor last night.

Sometimes, in my calmer moments, I have tried to reason that it was, and that all I experienced until daybreak was a dream. But such self-deception is futile. I am still uncertain of the exact point at which my dream broke off and grim reality took up the ordeal of horror; but this I know, as a final and inexorable proof—my throat still throbs with agonizing pain, and it is encircled by a livid weal—the imprint of a noose.

[*Here ends the journal of Joseph Worth.*]

(*Extract from The Bodmin Chronicle, April* 17)

MYSTERY OF THE MOOR

Tragic Death of Tourist Remains Unsolved

No evidence tending to clear up the mystery was adduced at the inquest held last

(Continued on page 859)

Doom Sounded for the Bound Man in

THE TICKING OF THE CLOCK

By A. & H. GREATRAIKES

IF JOHNSON'S mind had been at all imaginative or attuned to anything higher than brutal common sense, he would not have sat with his back to the open French window that night.

Johnson was a man with a good conceit of himself. He prided himself especially on his domestic accomplishments. He was a born cook and manager, he told his friends, and his hobby was to go down to a little bungalow of his in the country and "do" for himself, during the week-ends. Usually he had friends with him to whom he could show off his culinary art. But, sometimes, he liked to be alone.

He was a self-made man, was Johnson. His business, that of running up small flats and letting them to artizans (rent strictly in advance), brought him in a generous income, and it was his nature to boast of his smart modes of ejection if an unhappy tenant was not ready with his weekly payments.

This Saturday night he happened to be alone. His son, Tony, had said he might possibly turn up, but had not done so. Johnson had just finished a choice little meal, had cleared the table and settled himself in front of it, meaning to go into some accounts before he went to bed. He was feeling sleepy and particularly comfortable and too lazy to begin his work at once. He lighted his pipe and sat contentedly fingering a fat pocketbook on the table before him.

The twilight was coming on apace, and Johnson was just making up his mind to light a lamp when he heard a slight noise behind him.

"That you, Tony?" he asked, slowly turning his head.

The next moment he felt something thick and dark thrown over his head and face, while a sickening, deadly essence permeated his every sense. He struggled madly and tried to rise; fell back and collapsed insensible into the wooden armchair.

When he regained consciousness, he was gagged and bound—strapped into his seat in a way it was impossible to ease. Before him, facing the full moon, the light from which streamed in at the window, stood a man.

Who was he?

Johnson thought he recognized the face, half covered as it was by cap and muffler. But when the other, with an impatient movement, flung aside these wrappings, he knew him at once. It was young Merril, the cinema musician, whom he had ejected from one of his flats in his own inimitable way.

But how changed he was! The open face was haggard now and cynical. His deep-set eyes looked derisive, his lips twitched and the trembling hands were clenched.

"Do you remember me, my

friend?" he began. "You can not answer, of course, but I see you do. And do you remember the night you turned us out, my sick wife and me—out into the frost and snow without a penny? You had forgotten it, perhaps, but did you think *I* would forget? Perhaps you did. You have done so many brutal deeds. But you were mistaken this once, my friend—mistaken—this—once!"

The pupils of Johnson's eyes had expanded, as he tried with all his strength to pull back from the face of the speaker as it approached nearer and nearer to his with the emphasis of the last words. For there was mania written on the pallid countenance and the lurid glare of the wild eyes was shown up vividly by the moonlight.

"That night's exposure killed my wife," Merril went on hoarsely, standing up again. "She, my only friend, died as much by your hand as if you had actually shot her. Her delicate frame could not stand the roughing we had to go through. After three weeks of delirium, she died. It is for that—for that—that I have come to balance accounts."

Johnson's heart pounded in his chest. His eyes, the only means of expression left him, pleaded with his captor.

"Oh, I like the fear in your eyes, friend. They look so beseeching—like a rabbit, caught in a ferreting net. Yes, I could stand and watch them for hours! For I remember, you know, how my wife pleaded with you. And what you said, too—every word of it!—is branded on my very soul. . . . But the time is short and I must get about my business. I have come to make a little entertainment for you."

He turned toward the table.

"See! I am moving your things. Don't be alarmed. I shall not touch your money—your one god—but, if I did, it would not matter. You will have no need for it again, my friend. For I have brought you a present—something far more interesting than money—quite a pretty little thing and such a simple device. . . .

"Look! I have made the table clear and now I sweep aside the cloth that I may arrange my little toy for you to see. It is a clock, you notice. Just a small American thing. With the hour hand, I am connecting this little piece of wire. You can not make it out? But you will when I explain. This wooden box, to which the wire is joined at the other end, contains a little apparatus worked by electricity, and this other wire, emerging from the side of it, is connected with that stop on the clock, just under the twelve.

"Now do you understand? Ah, I see, by your eyes, that you guess! When the short hand reaches the twelve, the circuit will be connected by the stop. The electric apparatus will be set in motion. The box, my friend, also contains a powerful explosive! . . . . Yes, after 12 tonight, you will need no more money, for I have come to show you the same mercy that you showed my wife."

The man in the chair gave such a wild leap that it actually made a faint sound on the floor. His limbs, tied at every joint, were immovable.

Merril chuckled—the gibbering cackle of a maniac.

"I love to see you writhe, friend," he continued in a gloating tone, "I love to think of the commotion in that craven heart of yours. But look! The waiting is the worst part, after all, and it is 9 o'clock now. Already 9 o'clock, and you only have to wait till midnight. What is a wait of three hours to my three weeks of agony? . . .

"There! Now I have finished. There is no need of a light that you may see the time. The face of the clock is luminous. . . . It is the only light you will have—that and the

moon—a mere glow-worm fire to show you when the end is near. No one will come. I have taken care of that. So you will have these three last hours to yourself. . . . Good-bye, my dear friend, and in your last moments, think of my wife!"

Johnson's eyes were blood-shot and tense with fear: but, with a derisive nod, the other man turned away. He heard the click of the French window as it was carefully shut. He heard the crunch of feet on the gravel getting fainter and fainter. Then—but for the clock—utter silence.

Tick-*tick*, tick-*tick*, tick-*tick*.

TEN o'clock. The hands seemed to race over the dial as Johnson, with straining eyes, watched them go round. But there were still two hours. Surely someone would come to release him before that accursed clock reached midnight! There were neighbors not half a mile away. If he could only move one joint, he felt he could loose himself. If he could only call, surely someone would hear him! Could he move the chair! He tensed his body and tried. It would not move this way or that. It had been firmly tied to the table legs. An inarticulate sob rose to his throat. He could not utter it through the thick mass that was in his mouth. . . .

The shadows gathered darkly in the corners of the room. They were intensified by the moonlight, which lay in a silvery patch across the parquet floor. The tremulous nose of a mouse showed itself for an instant under the edge of the fender.

Tick-*tick*, tick-*tick*, tick-*tick*.

A quarter to 11.

The mouse, emboldened by the continued stillness, came forward stealthily into the open, ran half-way toward the chair; then, overcome by its own temerity, turned and fled under cover again.

There was a faint tapping at the window. The bound man's heart gave a sudden leap of hope. It was only the ivy leaves, stirred by a rising night-breeze, that fretted against the window-pane.

Tick-*tick*, tick-*tick*, tick-*tick*.

Five minutes to 12.

The form in the chair seemed to have shrunk into that of an old man. The sweat poured from the grayed forehead and fell in heavy drops on the cheeks. The eyes bulged from their sockets.

The mouse, fearing nothing now, boldly crossed from fender to chair, running over the left boot of the bound man as it made for the feast of crumbs beneath the table.

Tick-*tick*, tick-*tick*, tick-*tick*. . . .

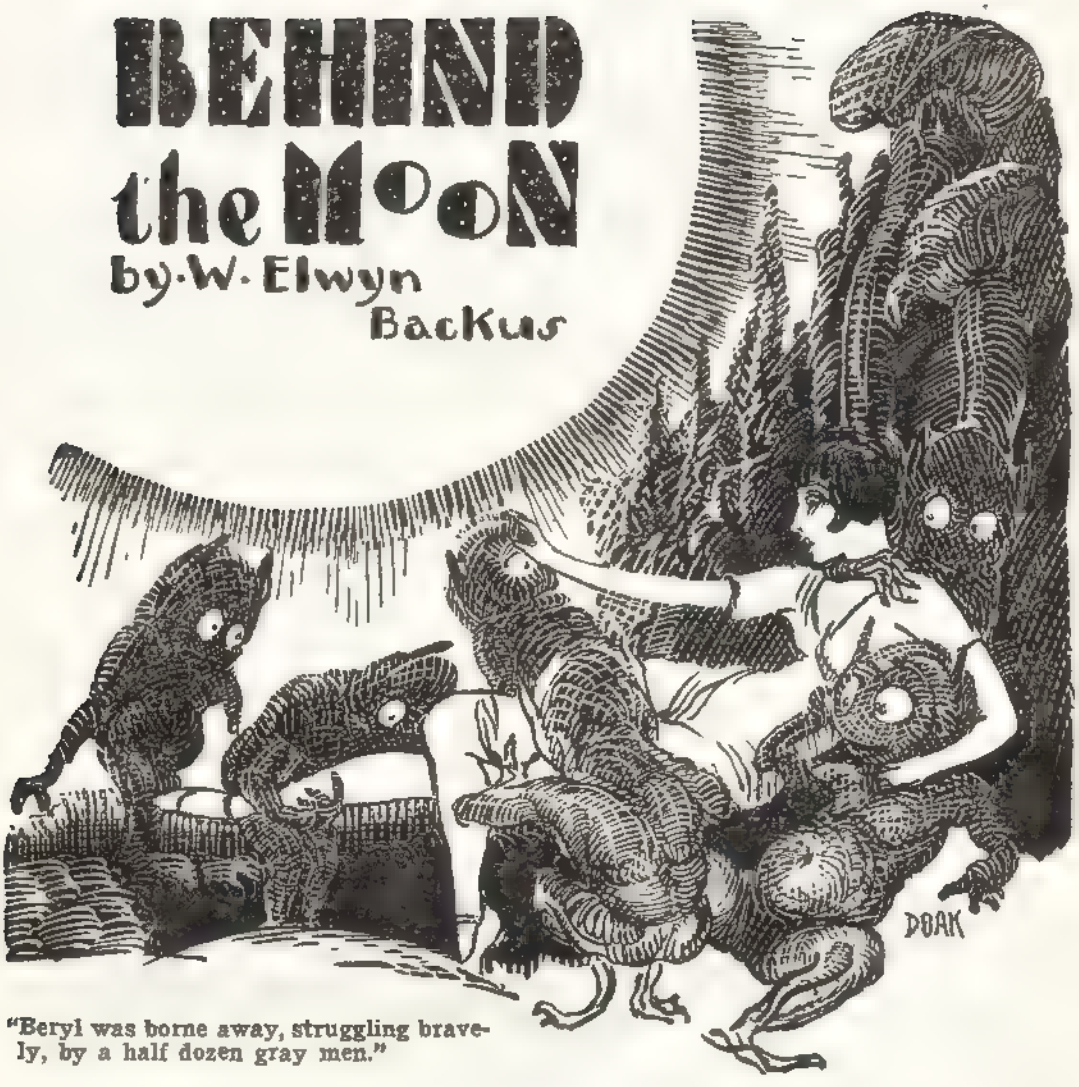
The glassy eyes of the dead man gazed with fixed horror at the dial before them.

The clock stopped.

But the silence was still profound—for the box on the table was empty.

BEHIND the MOON

by W. Elwyn Backus



"Beryl was borne away, struggling bravely, by a half dozen gray men."

PROLOGUE

ON THE night of Thursday, August 11, 1938, those who happened to be watching the skies from the Middle West and the East about midnight were startled by a strange and awe-inspiring spectacle; that, apparently, of a meteor "falling" upward—*from* the earth!

Many and weird were the conjectures that appeared in some of the nation's newspapers the next morning. However, it was the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* which first supplied the amazing details connected with the affair. The article follows:

SUICIDE PARTY HOPS OFF FOR MOON

DEFY ORDER OF WITHDRAWING PROMOTER

Withdrawal, under adverse public opinion, by the promoter of the Earth-to-Moon hop, and his subsequent order to dismantle the strange device just completed for this amazing attempt to span planetary space, evidently precipitated a pre-schedule leap off Mother Earth by the inventor of the Rocket, Philip Carewe, and those associated with him in a wild scheme of first-hand lunar study and possible colonization.

Attendants at Lunken Airport were aroused last night by an automobile pulling up near the giant Rocket. The latter had been conveyed there for its hop-off. Preparing to investigate, they were just in time to see a gigantic column of flame leap from

the propulsion tubes of this monster machine as it shot skyward.

So great was the impact of the fiery column, that a crater fifty feet in diameter and thirty feet deep was formed in the moist soil, softened by the recent unseasonal rains. The chassis of the automobile was found in the crater, melted into a shapeless mass.

One attendant, Arthur Brockner, 1215 Easter Avenue, was able to describe the spectacle vividly.

"I had just reached the door of the main hangar, a little ahead of the other boys," said Brockner, "when there was a blinding splash of intense white flame on the field, accompanied by a frightful, hissing roar. Simultaneously, a column of fire shot up and into the heavens, its head soaring on and on into space.

"At a height of what I would put at some thirty miles, it bent in its course, heading directly into the path of the moon. All this happened in less than five minutes.

"Fascinated, we continued to watch the Rocket's bright trail until approaching dawn made this invisible."

How many are in the Rocket is a question, though four members of the group pledged to go were missing from their homes. Whether or not they still are alive is another question. It is possible that one or more of them were blotted out, obliterated, by what may have been a premature blast and which destroyed their car. Yet the fact that not the slightest trace of them was found in the crater would seem to indicate that they had departed with the Rocket.

The one member of the original suicide party who did not go, Miss Ruth Hasken, of Milford, Ohio, reports that the others telephoned her late last night and importuned her to join them in their sudden, announced intention of "starting for the moon at once." She declined.

Further movements of the Rocket will be watched through powerful telescopes the world over, each night. As long as the supply of oxyhydrogen lasts in the large central tank with which the Rocket is equipped for its fiery propulsion through space, observers with the larger telescopes should be able to follow its trail anywhere between here and the moon, which is, roughly, some 240,000 miles distant now.

CHAPTER 1

APPARENTLY oblivious to the excitement that possessed his companions was the young man of the fine, gray eyes, who sat staring morosely out across the dimly lighted lawn. A light breeze ruffled his tousled blond hair over an intelligent forehead. About a mouth that plainly was designed to express the even good humor of its owner there now was a certain grim disappointment.

There were four round the table, in the little garden which they were wont to frequent since they had been drawn together in preparation for one of the weirdest adventures the mind of man had yet conceived. Three males and a girl of rather extraordinary charm. The remains of a late repast lay before them.

The strains of a waltz, wafted to them from a hidden orchestra, blended pleasantly with the soft timbre of the girl's voice as she read from the evening's *Times-Star,* though there was indignation in her tones. A becoming flush of vexation colored her rouge-free cheeks, and her large hazel eyes sparkled with mysterious fires.

——is gratifying to learn that Promoter Hanley has at last withdrawn from this criminally impractical venture. It had been hinted by some that, in backing the mad, 24-year-old inventor of the Rocket, Hanley was actuated by a vain desire to further advertise himself and, incidentally of course, the chewing gum known the world over by his name; this at the sacrifice of the lives of these irresponsible young daredevils who would risk practically certain death for a chance at the $500,000 that was to have been theirs if they should succeed. The money was, otherwise, to go to their beneficiaries, and had already been placed in escrow to this end.

Hanley maintains, however, that his prize offer had its inception in a statement by Professor William H. Peterson, of Jamaica, who calculated that an ordinary airplane traveling two hundred miles an hour would reach the moon in about fifty days—assuming, of course, that there were air throughout the intervening distance through which the plane could travel.

It is a fact that the moon is so much nearer to the earth than any other heavenly body, that the naked eye sees it more plainly than the greatest astronomer sees the nearest planet through his high-power telescope. The inventor of the Rocket had planned to leap through the vacuum which an airplane could not travel, and to reduce the airplane-time estimate to approximately one seventh!

The giant Rocket is to be dismantled and scrapped at once.

"Well, 'dare-devil' partners, there goes a glorious chance to convince a globeful of doubters and skeptics," the girl continued. "A great adventure gone wrong!"

The tall, almost too handsome male seated beside her placed a strong, tanned hand over her slim but capable-looking one.

"Never mind, Beryl. Old Mother Earth doesn't provide so bad a place, after all."

But she deftly slipped her fingers free from the grasp of her fiancé, bestowing upon him an enigmatic smile, and addressed him of the tousled locks across the table.

"Cheer up, Phil. Maybe we'd have backed out on you anyway. I know Ruth wasn't any too sure of going; while as for Don over there—her boy friend——"

"I'll vouch for Don any time," replied Phil. "I believe in you all, for that matter—though it's true that Ruth has been wavering. But the rest of you——" An idea appeared to seize him suddenly. "Look here. We *could* best the scoffers yet. The Rocket is completed, as you know—is even fully stocked with provisions and special togs; for, only on the eve, almost, of our departure is our backer afflicted by this safety-first germ bred by a lot of calamity howlers. He's spent his money freely for the Rocket. Now let's give him a run for it anyway, in spite of the pack. We can phone Ruth, arrange to pick her up on the way to the airport, and hop off before anyone has a chance to stop us. What do you say?"

His earnest gaze traveled appraisingly from one to the other of them; from Beryl Claverly, gracefully rounded, petite and brown-haired, a self-reliant, orphaned business girl of twenty-two, whose ability as a stenographer she had hoped to employ to advantage in taking down notes and typing a record of their adventure—if they lived to have any beyond the proposed hop-off into space; to Donald Armstrong, the stocky, sandy-haired, good-natured mechanician, who, oddly enough, had preached to rural congregations before he had decided that mechanical science held greater mysteries for him; and finally to John Sanderson, the stalwart botanist, whose talents had been intended for the study of whatever plant life the earth's satellite might hold. Would they see it through, now that the deed confronted them squarely—a leap into eternity perhaps? The idea left even Philip a little breathless, despite his long planning and the steeling of himself to this unparalleled adventure.

Beryl was the first to speak.

"I'll telephone Ruth," she said, getting up. "But whether she agrees or not to go with us, you can count on me. Yes, I know"—she smiled down Philip's protest about their expecting a lone girl to accompany them—"one poor little girl out there among the cold stars and mere males, and all that; but I'm going just the same. I'm old enough to know my mind and quite as able to take care of myself as any male, thank you. And that's that."

"And you can count on me," quietly put in Donald, his usually smiling, round face more serious than Beryl's.

"How about you, John?"

"Oh—you can count on me, Phil," after a moment's hesitation.

Presently Beryl returned.

"Ruth has reneged, as I half expected. She has absorbed that article in the paper and decided that the idea was all wrong in the first place. I've a suspicion that she may even try to have us stopped, so let's hurry. Leave-takings would merely complicate things—especially for Don. Eh, Don?"

"Well—I think you're right about a sudden leave-taking being best, Beryl," said that individual after a brief, thoughtful pause. "Come on, gang."

CHAPTER 2

AHEAD, the twin beams from the little sedan's headlamps swept the vast landing-field as Philip swung the car skilfully round and brought it to a quick stop.

A few yards away loomed one of the strangest machines ever devised by man, a machine in which these intrepid would-be pioneers of space expected to defy the laws of gravitation, to reach and explore that great expanse of lunar landscape which was turned to earthly view in all phases of its bleak glory once each month; and behind that face, too, where no man's eye had yet seen, even from afar.

Silently they got out and approached the colossal affair, which represented more than a year's construction, and years of dreaming and planning before that. One hundred and forty-two feet high, and thirty feet in diameter, it towered above them with its conical peak outlined against the moon's crescent as if eager to soar away to its destination somewhere in the universe.

"This way," Philip whispered softly, striding toward a narrow ladder of aluminum work whose polished outlines shone in ghostly relief against the black shadows.

Quietly they mounted between the five monster propulsion tubes, on which the Rocket rested, to the manholes which opened through the double floor into the lower chambers; or, rather, into one of the three triangular chambers that occupied the lower section of the Rocket.

Inside, Philip switched on the lights while Donald pulled up the ladder and screwed down the heavy, glass-centered hermetic caps over inner and outer manholes.

"'All ashore, those who are going ashore,' sang out Philip, simulating a sang-froid he was far from feeling. He glanced quickly about at the pale faces of the others, more than half expecting a general protest, even now, that this was carrying a joke too far, and a demand to be let out; such a protest as would likely rout his own wavering determination to see this wild adventure through if he had to go it alone. Beryl's hazel eyes returned his gaze calmly, if a bit widely. Donald's greenish ones watched him speculatively, a hint of humorous appreciation in their depths. Only the countenance of the tall, god-like John Sanderson betrayed a hint of indecision.

"Push off, Captain," said the girl, a slight tremolo in her voice.

"The 'ayes' have it, Phil, old fellow," remarked Donald. "Let's go."

Philip saw John Sanderson take a short step toward him as if to stop him, then halt in apparent indecision. He thought he heard a faint cry from the outside world in that moment of death-like silence inside the Rocket's sealed interior, and wondered whether their attempted departure had already been discovered. Well, it was too late for anyone to interfere now!

"Hold fast, everybody," he called grimly, glancing around once more to see that each one had gripped the heavy rungs provided for the start, each rung an integral part of a sliding section of the wall and floor, hydraulically balanced to absorb the major part of the shock of starting. Standing on the similarly balanced platform by the controls, he gripped the levers that directed the machine-gun-like explosions of oxyhydrogen in the propulsion tubes, which were shaped like flaring cannon.

There was a muffled roar—a terrific lurch — intense pressure underfoot—then a numbing reaction as the hydraulic apparatus slipped back toward normal. They were on their way at last, soaring toward the roof of the universe with increasing velocity as Philip maneuvered the propulsion controls with extreme caution. For the danger of too great physical shock was coupled with that of air friction outside. He must guard against heating the Rocket to meteor-like incan-

descence, which would result from too rapid movement through the envelope of atmosphere that blankets the earth a hundred miles or more deep.

With the aid of periscope, thermometer and altimeter, he guided the great projectile up from the earth's plane to the floor of the vacuum lined by the air layers' rarest outposts. Behind him Donald busied himself quietly, with pressure gages and oxygen control for their air supply, also checking their course as the pull of the crystal-covered, moonlight-sensitive selenium in the Rocket's cone began to make itself felt when the erratic early rush of the machine settled into a more constant and increased speeding toward its objective. Released from the danger and resistance of air friction, the great projectile was doubling and redoubling its velocity as the drag of the earth's gravity decreased with the fast-growing distance intervening. From an estimated initial velocity of a mere one hundred and fifty miles an hour, they already had attained ten times that velocity; and the peak was, by no means, yet reached. Maximum propulsion and dwindling gravitation should, according to Philip's careful figuring, culminate in a velocity of approximately 2,500 miles an hour! Allowing for cautious manipulation at both ends of their route, and barring accident, they might expect to reach the moon easily in about a week. There, if the rash venture had not suffered disaster, our planet's satellite might yet know the "neighborliness" of interplanetary commerce! Provided, of course, that the moon were inhabited by thinking creatures.

Philip's thoughts toyed with these strange conjectures as he nursed the Rocket to a course and speed of stability where he could relinquish the controls for a time. Sanderson, as well as Donald, had been drilled in the intricacies of the Rocket's control, so that each might stand watch. How difficult it seemed to grasp the fact that they were already a small world unto themselves, soaring between stars!

Presently Donald, who no longer found it necessary to adjust gages and such, came over to Philip.

"Want me to relieve you, Phil?"

He did. He turned away with a sigh of relief from the terrific tension of that first, momentous hop-off.

Sanderson was staring moodily through one of the window-like openings through the Rocket's double shell —it was between these two shells that the supplies of water and oxygen were stored, while above them, in the great central chamber, was stored that all-important surplus of gas that must drive them to the moon and back. Beryl had retired into another of the three compartments within the lower part of the Rocket's barrel.

"Well, you're a 'sky pilot' in more ways than one now, Don," Sanderson remarked as the other took the controls. "For a minister turned mechanic, you certainly do fly high."

"Not nearly so 'high' as we may fly if we shunt into one of these stray meteors en route," was the prompt come-back.

Philip's blood chilled suddenly. Derelicts of the sky! That was something he had not counted upon. Strange how one might plan for every seeming emergency, and then overlook entirely something like that. Well, it was one of the chances they must take, just as a great liner takes that ten-thousand-to-one chance of striking some uncharted obstruction in midocean.

CHAPTER 3

Noon of "Saturday," the space-flyers' second earthly day out, found them with more than an eighth, or some 30,000 miles, of their route covered according to Philip's observations of the moon's swelling size. Already they were beyond any appreciable pull of gravitation from the earth, whose ever-so-faintly-illumi-

nated face was barely visible behind them, lit, as its visible hemisphere was, solely by the reflection of the moon's fattening crescent.

The continual driving power of the explosions through the propulsion tubes, ever accelerating their movement, helped them to maintain their own "weight" and equilibrium within the Rocket's chambers in spite of the weakening pull of the planet they were leaving so rapidly behind.

But this happy normality was not to continue indefinitely. It was Beryl who first noticed something amiss.

Until now, every mechanical detail of the Rocket had functioned perfectly. The big, high-pressure, central chamber of oxyhydrogen gas showed but slight depletion on the pressure gage; the oxygen air-devitiating supply and air-purifying apparatus, the water and the supply of condensed foods, the electric heating and lighting energy—all were as should be, apparently.

Sanderson was at the controls for the time, Philip checking over their supplies. Donald was snatching some needed rest. Beryl, who had insisted upon doing a shift like the rest, was prospecting about, having lately risen from a refreshing sleep. At first she had doubted that she could sleep at all, with the roaring of the tubes in her ears; but that din had been reduced to a dull muttering with their passage beyond the atmosphere belt.

It was a different note in this important muttering of explosions that she now noticed. She had just looked into one of the peak periscopes to study again the fascinating image of the satellite toward which they were now, supposedly, rushing at approximately two thousand miles an hour!

But the mirror failed to show the broadening crescent. No longer was the Rocket headed toward the moon!

Raising her head, she listened again and more intently, with a slowly gathering sense of alarm. Why were they no longer pointed directly toward the moon? What connection had this with that curious change in the pulsation of the quintet of tubes beneath the Rocket's sealed floor? She felt faintly dizzy, uncertain on her feet, as one feels after turning round several times in some childish game. Sanderson and Philip appeared, however, not to have noticed anything amiss, but this might be due to their both being seated.

"Phil—John!" she cried. "Something's wrong with me—or with us. Listen."

She saw Philip pale and rise unsteadily to his feet. Sanderson peered anxiously into the peak periscope before him, then quickly toward Philip. There was panic in his eyes.

"We're—we're off course, Phil," he said. "What makes us feel so——"

"Number five is slowing down!" shouted the inventor, staggering a little as his trained ear now led him toward the pipe-line that fed the firing-mechanism of the offending tube. "We're traveling in a circle—like a pinwheel!"

He reached the clock regulating device on that tube, by which the terrific gas explosions were regulated independently as desired, and began feverishly to inspect it.

At that moment all sound of firing in number five ceased!

It might here be explained that the reason for individual timing on each tube was that this arrangement permitted of changing the course of the Rocket by accelerating the explosions in one, two or three tubes on any side. Normally, however, all five tubes were timed alike, for a straight course. It was the pull or attraction of the moon-sensitive selenium exposed under the glass covering of the Rocket's conical head that had maintained their course almost automatically ever since Philip had first maneuvered the giant machine into its original course by means of the separate timing levers. The cessation altogether of the firing in any tube, however, meant that they would

be thrown completely and violently off their course.

Simultaneously with the cessation of firing in number five, one wall of the chamber appeared to tower suddenly above them, at the same time drawing them toward it with irresistible force. Unprepared for this phenomenon, Philip felt himself thrown against that wall crashingly.

For a moment he lay there dazed. Then he became aware of a soft, warm bundle pressed against him. It was Beryl, as dazed as he, one arm twined instinctively about his neck. A few feet away Sanderson was wriggling to a sitting posture against the pressing wall, while in the doorway of the men's quarters opposite, Donald clung desperately.

"Centrifugal force," he yelled. "We're chasing our own tail round and round." He essayed a scared smile. "What a treat for our astronomer friends at home with the telescopes! Say, we've got to tie into that clock affair somehow before we get too woozy, or——"

"Wait," cried Philip, disengaging himself somewhat reluctantly and as gently as possible from Beryl's clasp. He helped her into a more secure position. Then he began crawling laboriously toward the control by means of various, mercifully handy valve-handles and other mechanical projections within reach here and there on the floor. Finally he managed to clutch the railing round the nest of controls. A moment later he had jerked over the main lever, cutting off the explosions in all five tubes.

In the odd quiet that followed, the centrifugal force which had swung the inmates of the Rocket against the wall was suddenly and disconcertingly lacking. With the propulsion of the tubes lacking also, the weakened pull of the earth's gravitation many thousands of miles away supplied but little stability to the adventurers in their movements. Their weights now reduced to but a small fraction of normal, they found it extremely difficult to walk about without bumping their heads against the wall above them—"wall" because the Rocket had been on a swing parallel to the earth's surface at the moment Philip cut off the tubes. The consequence was that the Rocket was now traveling at a right angle to its original course—at a speed of probably a thousand miles an hour! Whether the selenium could overcome this force in time to check their mad rush so far off course was a question.

But already Philip and Donald were at work upon the offending mechanism. For thirty-five precious minutes they labored tediously while Beryl and Sanderson looked on in stunned silence. Everything—the success of their adventure, their very lives—depended upon the perfect mastery of all five tubes' propulsion. For even if the selenium did eventually right their course, and bring them to the moon, without that perfect control they would be powerless to break the terrific force of the Rocket's fall on to the moon!

At last the cover of the recalcitrant mechanism was snapped into place once more. Philip and Donald exchanged breathless glances as the young inventor paused before trying the tubes again.

"Here's luck," said Philip as, with nerves taut, he prepared to throw the switch that should ignite the gas in the chambers and set into motion simultaneously the five powerful driving-devices.

Four hearts almost ceased beating for one brief instant. Then——

"They're off!" yelled Donald as the even roar of every tube smote upon their eardrums.

Never had a din sounded more welcome to human ears. Never had human beings heard sweeter music than the steady, throbbing explosions in the great, vacuous space behind and around them. For one long minute they waited anxiously for a possible

return of the Rocket's tail-chasing antics—and, happily, in vain.

With careful precision, Philip began to time the explosions on opposite sides so as to swing the Rocket gradually back to its course. Slowly the slice of moon swung into full view in the peak periscope. One great peril had been met and conquered for the time.

CHAPTER 4

SUNDAY saw the adventurers speeding steadily across the sky toward their objective without further mishap. Beryl had spent several hours in the typing of a detailed account of their trip, to date, in duplicate. The copy was to be dispatched back toward earth by means of a smaller rocket!

This projectile was to be fired from a gun that was built into the floor of one of the three chambers, near the middle of the Rocket's circumference. Once this miniature Rocket was shot at the earth, it was reasonable to believe that the combined force of its discharge and subsequent self-propulsion, and the earth's gravitation, would result in the carrying of its sealed chamber of news to the millions eagerly awaiting this story. As for the possibilities of radio transmission, even had they been equipped to send while racing through space, that would have been out of the question, for they had not been able to get more than a murmur on their ultra-modern receiving-set from the powerful radiocasting stations on earth; and not even that murmur could be got now. This precluded the possibility of radio communication between planets—at least with present-day equipment.

"Suppose this ether-mail rocket we send falls into some gathering of people," said Beryl. "What then?"

"A mechanically controlled, metal-parachute device is timed to open gradually so as to retard and reduce the fall of the aluminum rocket to almost nothing as it passes through the progressive strata of atmosphere round the earth," Philip explained. "The same action will also release and expel the unburned reserve of gas, so cutting off the power of the rocket's driving-mechanism. This final kindling of the gas, together with a quantity of smudge powder, will produce a harmless flare with a heavy smoke visible either night or day as a signal and a warning.

"The theory sounds fine, Professor," observed Sanderson. "May I apply now for position as postmaster-general of the lunar-earth mails?"

He turned his handsome profile aside toward Beryl as if inviting her applause, but she appeared to have lost interest in the subject.

"Apply to your heart's content," put in Donald. "Try applying some of your talent now to checking and maintaining this space-ship's course."

The sealing and firing of the mail rocket was a ceremony to which they all had looked forward as eagerly as children with a new toy. It was improbable that another one could be sent with a reasonable chance of its arriving on earth, for they would soon be so far away that the available charge in so small a cylinder would scarcely carry it safely within the earth's pull before it had wandered into space off to one side perhaps. They did have, however, one reserve rocket. The dispatching was set for "mid-afternoon"—though out here in space the sun blazed incessantly, unrelentingly, out of a black, airless void, all but overheating the walls of the great metal projectile despite the terrible sub-zero temperature without. Their electric heating-apparatus had therefore been taxed surprizingly little, thus bearing out Philip's theory that the thin atmosphere of the moon —if, indeed, there was any atmosphere on that body—was not unbearably cold during the long lunar day of approximately 350 hours.

The slim, shining cylinder was at last fitted into the torpedo-like cham-

ber of the firing-device, and the breech closed securely. Would that explosion prove too much for the little "world" in which they were precariously voyaging? Suppose calculations on the strength of this part of the Rocket proved wrong. Might not the touching-off of that fuse mean instant obliteration for them all? Such were the thoughts that ran through Philip's mind as he hesitated before pressing the button which would flash the electric spark to the fuse.

A sudden lurch, accompanied by a sharp clap as of thunder—and a thin shaft of flame streaked earthward.

Eagerly they watched its trail dwindle rapidly in the distance, through the glass floor-well. The first astronomical mail was on its way!

"With reasonable luck, our message should be picked up, radiocast, and running under scare heads in the leading newspapers the world over within the next sixty hours," said Philip.

"'Wuxtra! All about the saps in the moon Rocket'," howled Donald in nasal mimicry of a newsboy.

"My report," observed Beryl, with some pride, "will tell them all about our loop-the-loop exhibition. I guess Ruth will heave an extra sigh of relief that she stayed where she is. But I think it's just grand, really—loops and all."

"Atta girl!" cried Philip. "I nominate you as first-class cheer-leader and morale-booster of this expedition here and now."

"Seconded," said Donald.

"Carried, okeyed and duly recorded," appended Philip, missing a queer look from Sanderson.

CHAPTER 5

The Man-in-the-Moon, looking from out of the eastern half of his face, seemed to smirk sardonically down on one of the strangest spectacles within his fifty-odd million years of existence. Close by, like a mote in his eye —a mere thousand miles or so away— hung an infinitesimal speck. As if to taunt him, this curious object, which had first appeared in his vision as a comet with a short but dazzlingly brilliant tail, had twisted about and was even now spitting flame directly into his face!

However, he continued to smile, for it was hourly becoming more evident that this intruder, whatever its nature, was caught in its own folly, since it was steadily falling toward him, despite its plainly futile efforts to turn about and flee. Soon he would ensnare it in one of the many wrinkles or pits in his countenance and see what manner of thing this was.

But inside the Rocket there was neither consternation nor confusion. The controls functioning perfectly, and the giant conical head now safely diverted and held away from the jagged face of the satellite, it was but a matter of a few hours before those inside might settle upon the queer terrain glaringly outlined in the blazing sunlight—provided, of course, all continued to go well.

Cautiously, with the explosions slowed to a minimum in the propulsion tubes, Philip allowed the Rocket to drop closer to the lunar landscape—if such the forbidding array of craters and the jagged ruts that passed here and there for valleys could be termed. They were now closer to the moon, visually—by the naked eye—than a twelve-inch telescope brought it on earth, this instrument reducing the total intervening distance to approximately five hundred miles; but the resultant magnification of the atmospheric disturbances distorted telescopic vision from earth by a good half, so that it was equivalent to that of at least one thousand miles distant. Yet, even at that visual distance, sufficient detail was clear to have enabled astronomers to map the lunar surface more accurately than the most remote regions of their own globe.

"Has the moon higher mountains than the earth, I wonder," said Beryl.

"Our Mount Everest, with 29,141 feet altitude, about equals the height of the Liebnitz range over there by the southern pole—as computed by the length of the shadows they cast," said Philip, pointing through one of the glass-enclosed window-wells.

"That makes this range much higher, proportionately, than our own highest peaks," observed Donald, "for the earth is several times larger than the moon."

"Exactly. If terrestrial ranges were similarly proportioned, we would have there peaks ten to fifteen miles high."

"Do you suppose that if the moon has inhabitants, they are correspondingly taller than us?" Beryl queried anxiously.

"There is nothing to guide us in such a conjecture," said Philip.

"Now, just suppose, Professor," put in Sanderson, emphasizing the last word faintly and with an odd glint in his eye, "just suppose our Beryl, here, were suddenly to come upon a moon-being of monstrous stature and evil intent, with several like monsters at his heels. What would you recommend—or do? Level the trusty gat—what?"

It had grown increasingly evident during the last forty-eight hours or so that the tall botanist was slightly jealous of the attention Beryl gave Philip in their ordinary association and conversation.

Philip's reply was drowned by a shout from Donald, who was staring below excitedly through the floor-well.

"We're dropping into a valley of fire!" he shouted. "Pull 'er up, Phil!"

Four pairs of eyes riveted themselves upon the terrain immediately beneath them, which began to slide off to one side as Philip tilted the Rocket by means of increased propulsion through two of the tubes on one side. Between jagged ridges which formed a pass from one huge crater to another, a wall of steam or whitish smoke rose high above the surface in ragged streamers, drifting slowly eastward in a semi-opaque fog that made piloting of the Rocket exceedingly difficult. Already the tips of the hungry white fingers were reaching above the Rocket!

For a few tense moments the Rocket slipped through an enveloping haze that hid the black, star-studded sky above as effectively as it did the bright terrain below. Then, abruptly, they were out of it again, the streamers behind them silhouetted against the dark heavens—dark, still, almost to the point of blackness, because of the nearly complete absence of atmosphere at this height to catch and reflect the sun's rays.

The Rocket now was fast leaving the mysterious valley behind, skimming across the satellite's surface away from its sunrise side with increasing speed. Philip thought he had recognized the craters of Cyrillus and Catharina back there, the misty pass linking the two.

"That didn't look like a fire, after all," Donald remarked. "What did you all think of it, gang?"

"A volcanic crevasse with steam and gasses escaping," guessed Beryl. "What do you think it was, Phil?"

Again that odd look from Sanderson; but she was not conscious of it—or else chose to ignore it.

"I believe it's the terrific heat of the sun beating down through the rare atmosphere, melting and vaporizing the snow that collected in the valley or canyon during the long lunar night," said Philip, voicing a theory which they were later to discover to be a fact. "It looks as if we're going to have a tough time of it at 'noon', should we land when those peaks no longer throw a cooling shadow."

The sun, however, lighted but a half of the moon's face at present, the latter being at what we know as "half

moon", its western half being still hidden from the adventurers in the inky lunar night.

"It is my guess," Philip continued, "that the moon gets just as hot at midday as it gets cold at night—if you get what I mean. If we find any animal life at all, we'll probably find that it exists mainly in caverns."

Presently a new phenomenon was observed, this time by Beryl.

"What could those funny light streaks be, radiating from that big crater over there?"

Comparing the crater she pointed out with the maps he had before him, Philip identified it as Copernicus.

"Those streaks," he smiled, "have caused that question to be asked countless times. And no one yet has been able to explain them satisfactorily. We'll drop closer and have a look, and settle this mystery if we can."

Carefully, he let the Rocket down till it was less than five miles above the level of the lofty crater tops. From this elevation it became evident that the streaks were giant fissures in the ground, probably rifts brought about by terrific volcanic upheavals of the past in the brittle lava surface. A white deposit seemed to have been blown out of these crevasses since, covering the surface immediately about them. The latter bore out a theory advanced by Professor Peterson, that the streaks were deposits of pumice or some similar deposit blown out by surface vents.

It was about an hour later that the Rocket, its sidewise travel checked, was slipping along close over the rim opposite the sunrise side of a crater at the edge of the daylit area. Philip recognized it from the lunar chart as Eratosthenes, close by the equator, with several smaller craters about it. This was the region named as the "most alive" by certain astronomers, where melting snows apparently called into existence and watered vegetation of a sort, which showed in progressive tones of gray-green within the crater beds or floors. Hence it was here that Philip hoped to land the Rocket first.

But the first-time landing of a 180-ton machine propelled by high-explosive force was to prove far from simple. Though Philip had expected to drop the Rocket within the crater's rim, where the "live" tones invited, this bull's-eye slid off disconcertingly to one side as he maneuvered the Rocket.

The jagged rim with its black shadows beyond seemed suddenly to rush upward. A great tooth-like point shot directly toward them.

Frantically, Philip threw on still more force in the tubes. But the next instant the Rocket was plunged into a curtain of velvet blackness, rent only by the blinding incandescence of their fiery tail spurting into the Stygian depths beneath them.

CHAPTER 6

JUST what followed registered but vaguely in Philip's mind. He remembered the abrupt blotting out of the sun as he strove to counter their sidewise fall. Then a terrific jar shook the Rocket. A scream rang in his ears even as all went blank.

When next he knew consciousness, he looked up to see Beryl's anxious face bent over his head, which rested in her lap as she bathed his forehead in chilled water. Over her shoulder he encountered Donald's troubled gaze, and, beyond, the enigmatic watchfulness of John Sanderson.

A sharp pain shot through his head as he tried to raise it. It seemed surprizingly light, despite the dizziness that thwarted the attempt.

"Easy, Phil," cautioned Donald. "You bounced your knob against a control lever when we lit, and I don't mean 'possibly'."

Philip suddenly noticed, with sinking heart, the outer, curving side of the cylindrical chamber overhead.

"Everything seems to be shipshape, Phil," supplied Beryl, achieving a brave smile. "Nothing seriously damaged; inside, at least, even if we did do a flipflop and land on one side. Donald's modesty forbids his telling you that his own presence of mind in promptly stopping the firing in the tubes at the moment we struck doubtless saved us all."

"At that, I'll bet we plowed up a half-mile of lunar landscape," Sanderson appended. "Lucky we didn't bring up against one of those craters."

"Lucky *you* didn't break your precious neck," retorted Donald peevishly. "Well, folks, wherever we may be, we have arrived, anyway. Black as a villain's heart outside, though. Can't see a thing."

He moved awkwardly toward a window-well.

"Gosh," he said. "I feel kind of shaky myself."

But in this he had plenty of company.

Philip managed to get to his feet, notwithstanding a terrific throbbing in his head.

"Thanks a lot, Beryl," he said gratefully. "Now we'll have to try to find out something definite about our situation, if we can. I wonder—say, I feel like a feather. By George! that reminds me—one should weigh but a sixth of his earthly weight here. That makes me weigh about thirty pounds! Beryl, *you* don't weigh much more than a good-size family album."

"Well, 'small packages' and 'good things' are synonymous, you know," she reminded him, laughing.

Intent inspection through the windows proved the accuracy of Donald's statement; they couldn't, indeed, distinguish any one thing, though it was faintly evident that some sort of blurred landscape lay without.

"Turn off the lights, Don," said Philip, indicating the main switch near the other's hand.

The Rocket's interior was plunged into darkness.

Gradually, as their eyes adjusted themselves to the lack of light, the blurred objects outside took on indistinct yet faintly discernible outlines. It seemed at first that the Rocket had come to rest on a floor of white sand.

"Why, it's snowing!" cried Beryl abruptly. "And look at the *size* of those flakes!"

"Those are pancakes, not snowflakes," observed Donald, peering out. "Gosh, they're as big as my hand."

The top of a single, huge boulder close beside the Rocket was draped in a mantle of clinging white, while huge, feathery flakes settled with exaggerated slowness like a slow-motion picture. What a happy miracle, thought Philip as he saw it, that the Rocket had not crashed into that rock, head on!

"I'm going out to investigate," he said, making for the closet that contained the portable oxygen tanks, the warming suits, and glass-vizored respiration masks with which the Rocket had been equipped to combat the anticipated rarity of the moon's atmosphere.

"I'm with you," spoke up Donald, quickly.

"Someone should guard the Rocket," said Philip. "How about you this time, John? And, Beryl, you'd better stay until we sample this lunar atmosphere."

"Some people get all the fun," she pouted.

"We'll be back in a jiffy," promised Philip, rashly.

The inside manhole was removed, then replaced and screwed tightly behind them as they slipped into the well through the now perpendicular floor. There was a tense moment as the two paused before lifting the outer manhole from its seat. Would the lunar atmosphere prove to be an utter vacuum, causing the natural pressure within their bodies to explode their very flesh into puffed monstrosities? Would the cold be so intense that the heavy, electrically heated garments

they wore would fail to protect them even for an instant? These were the doubts that besieged them.

Both fears were quickly dispelled as they lifted the manhole clear. No gripping hand of vacuum seized them. No paralyzing wave of cold seared them as they leaned out and surveyed the white landscape, though it was apparent that the cold was severe.

On account of the precarious tilt of the Rocket's base, they were obliged to lower themselves, feet first, with the aid of a rope which they fastened to a rung underneath, down the smooth surface between the flaring tubes which projected from the floor like giant blunderbusses; a distance of about a dozen feet to the snow-covered ground. Owing to the possibility of a complete lack of atmosphere outside the Rocket, it had not been practicable to drop the ladder into position through the manholes. For, with both openings uncovered at one time, the precious supply of atmosphere within would have been expelled into a vacuum in one quick blast.

As they dropped into the white fluff, it rose in a cloud, to settle back slowly to a depth of about two feet. Clearly, the slight weight of everything on the moon was responsible for this phenomenon. But it also indicated the reassuring presence of a fairly normal supply of air—or some other gaseous substitute. Their own clumsy movements, it struck Philip, were something like those of divers undersea, their progress at once helped and hindered by their reduced weight in the element round them.

A quick survey of their immediate surroundings showed further how lucky had been their escape. For though the Rocket had left no perceptible path in the lightly settled flakes, through which they pushed, knee-deep, without effort, its position indicated the direction it had plowed before coming to rest — less than four feet from the large boulder they had observed from inside. The carpet of snow, light as it was, had doubtless figured in the miracle of their sliding fall and stop without shattering the brittle glass cone at the Rocket's peak, which Philip could see with his flash was still intact!—an added and inexplicable miracle.

Visibility was limited to less than a dozen yards. Only a dull glow from behind them indicated the lighted window-wells through the heavy veil of flakes. The moon was in that part of its orbit where even if the earth were at zenith in the lunar heavens, instead of low upon the horizon, it would not have been visible to reflect "earthlight" on to the moon's night landscape; this because the side of the earth toward them was its night side, the sun being well beyond it. When, however, the moon should be approximately between the earth and the sun, the earth would appear as an immense "moon" itself, lighting its satellite's night terrain with several times the brilliance of earthly moonlight as we know it.

The cold, which at first they had not felt so keenly in the excitement of setting foot upon lunar soil, already was making itself uncomfortably evident, though chiefly through their masks. These were not heated like the rest of their suits, though they were heavily lined with fur. It was apparent that they could accomplish little under present conditions. Philip drew close to Donald, to grasp his arm and communicate a suggestion to return to the Rocket.

But in that instant the other suddenly gripped his arm tightly, pointing with his other hand in evident excitement off to where the light from his flashlight faded into indistinguishable grayness.

Philip directed the beam of his own light toward the same spot. At first he could see nothing that might have aroused Donald's excitement. Then, his flesh tingling at the sight, he saw a convex object like the top of a big

ball, rising up out of the white fluff about ten yards away!

Slowly, eerily, this strange object continued to rise, swelling in size as the loosely packed flakes slid down its sloping sides, until approximately a fifth of a flattish sphere was revealed. At this point the edge of the object came into view. It was much like a giant mushroom.

As the edge raised farther, the blackness underneath was penetrated sufficiently by the glow of their flashlights for them to observe a stem-like affair in the center, coming up out of a great, round, black well, somewhat smaller in diameter than the cap itself.

For a half minute the pair stood motionless with amazement. Then a blinding white light suddenly enveloped them.

CHAPTER 7

"THE sun!" cried Donald, jerking off his headgear in wild abandon.

For one long, tense second Philip waited for the worst, half expecting to see Donald's features convulsed in sudden gasping for air. But the other only shivered and promptly replaced the fur lining of the respiration mask he had pulled off in his joy of seeing the sunlight again. Philip glanced up at the towering rim of the crater against the sun's glare—the crater whose edge they had fortunately missed when they fell just beyond into its long black shadow which was now slowly shortening in the light of lunar dawn.

Removing his own outer headgear, Philip found the atmosphere not unpleasant, though rare like that on our own high peaks. The cold was not so intense, after all. That blazing sun, penetrating the thin, rare band of lunar atmosphere, already was making itself felt. Indeed, the settling saucer-like flakes had all but disappeared from the air already, seemingly a product of moisture temporarily stored in the air immediately around them, rather than of any cloud formation above.

In their astonishment and exhilaration at the sun's abrupt dawning, Philip and Donald had momentarily forgotten the curious object pushing its way up out of the white blanket on the ground. To their further amazement and some uneasiness, they now observed more of these caps rising into view all around them.

At the same time a faint mist began to fill the air, swirling between them and the caps. The feathery snow seemed to be dissolving into a lazy white vapor in the sun—much like the white streamers they had elsewhere observed from above in the Rocket.

The nearest of the caps had ceased to rise—had come to rest some five feet above the steaming snow's surface. It appeared to be formed of metal or stone, or of some composition, perhaps, entirely unknown to them. It measured about twenty-five feet in diameter.

But stranger still were the creatures that peered out at them through the mist, between the snow and the rims of these huge mechanical mushrooms. Squat and leaden-gray like their curious protective contrivances were their heads, immediately conspicuous for two very large round eyes guiltless of eyelids or lashes, and like nothing so much as squashed spheres. A repulsive, sucker-like aperture answered for a mouth, while a sort of gill protuberance did duty for a nose. Of hair on their heads they had none, save such as grows on the back of the average man's hand. The result was an unsightly bareness of skull that increased their general repulsiveness, for their skin was moist and slithery—like freshly filled sausage skins in a butcher's window.

Philip suppressed a shudder. These were the lunarites, with whom they must deal. Fear or unchecked loathing would not help their mission. Then the thought of the girl inside the Rocket came to him like a shock, and

he shuddered again. If these offensive creatures attempted to do her, and them, violence—well, he would sell his life as dearly as possible.

The lunarites appeared hesitant to come forth. They continued to stare owlishly at these visitors from the heavens, from under the protection of their giant mushrooms. Curious, sibilant, thin cries sounded as they gesticulated and pointed with oddly twisted arms and fingers, now at Philip and Donald, now at the Rocket beyond them.

Soon, however, several generated sufficient courage to clamber out from under the more distant caps. These were quickly followed by others. A gray horde rapidly was gathering now, on squat but slender legs that were like saplings—was moving cautiously, curiously closer.

Other details about these disquieting creatures registered indelibly in Philip's mind as the gray circle shrank about them; he could already count more than twenty of the caps near by through the rising mist which already was stretching long white streamers skyward in the dimming sunlight like those they had encountered before while in flight. From each of these caps now scrambled an unending stream of lunarites. Slightly less than four feet tall they were, with oversized, oddly peaked ears—so proportioned, probably, to aid their owners in catching all available sound in their world's rare atmosphere. It was this rareness of atmosphere that doubtless accounted for the ghost-like quality of the flakes and the white blanket they had formed, which was evaporating rather than melting.

Philip observed too—first in amazement, then with dawning understanding—that these beings were without clothing other than a narrow sash affair about their flat hips! Apparently they were fairly immune to cold; though the rim of the slowly rising sun had already moderated the temperature enough to make his heavy garb uncomfortable, even with the electric pads in it turned off. It was evident that his supposition that the lunar day when cleared of mists near noon—or even when well advanced in the 350-hour day—reached withering temperatures, was correct, at least so far as concerned this region.

"Hadn't we better give these babies something to think about?" suggested Donald. "A flash of gunpowder up in the air or something?"

He tapped the automatic at his belt.

"Just stand firm," said Philip. "It won't do to let them get the idea that we are afraid of them, nor do we want to frighten them. Somehow we must contrive to win their confidence—if we can."

He advanced a pace in front of Donald and threw up one hand in a gesture of greeting to the little gray men. Immediately those in front fell back, crowding the others in mild panic. Evidently they regarded these strange beings from out of space with awe. A little flurry of excited twittering and squeaking was heard again.

Pointing in the general direction of the earth, Philip made a sweeping gesture back to the moon, next pointing significantly toward the Rocket looming in the vapor behind him. How he wished it were standing up in position to take flight again at will in an emergency! A fresh gibbering here broke out among the nearer ranks, and numbers of these lunarites patted the tops of their hairless heads—probably a sign of understanding.

"Now what?" inquired Donald, disconcertingly.

"How do I know?" retorted Philip, unfastening his suit about the top.

"Gosh, this lunar sunshine is a fast worker," Donald muttered, doing the same.

PHILIP was just wondering what he might offer the lunarites as a good-will gift — if he could single out a leader — when, as if in answer to a wish, a lunarite who was a good head

taller than his fellows appeared from among them. He approached Philip and Donald slowly. A trifle less grotesque than the others, with less flattened head, there was a suggestion of intelligence about him, even in those nearly expressionless, unlidded eyes. A shorter lunarite beside him bore on outstretched hands a flat metallic slab with what appeared to be some sort of food heaped on it in an olive-hued mound.

It was then that Philip noticed three peculiar, twining fingers on those hands—like thickened fingers of a vine, with which it clutches and clings to things!

"If it's something to eat he's got there, I hope it's not as slippery as he looks," whispered Donald, inelegantly.

Presently the creatures halted before Philip, the leader evidently selecting him, also, as a leader by reason of his being taller than Donald, and gravely handed Philip the slab. Then, after making signs unmistakably identifying the substance thereon as food, he stepped back a pace and waited. Obviously, he expected them to begin eating then and there.

"If we refuse to at least nibble on this, they'll probably get sore and blot us out," mourned Donald.

But Philip merely smiled at the leader and pointed up again, then shook his head in what he hoped might be understood in the negative. He could not bring himself to eat that curious gelatinous substance; nor did he feel that he or Donald need risk it. The impression he tried to convey for the time being was that they did not eat at all, or at least did not require any food then.

His signs at last understood, apparently, there followed a conference of bewildered astonishment between the nearest lunarites and their leader. They conversed among themselves in their strange tongue, which sounded not unlike the hissing undertone of a large congregation intoning a prayer. They waved their scrawny, warped arms about excitedly.

Presently they seemed to reach an agreement. The others fell back from around the leader, who once more approached Philip, this time without the food offering. Halting a few feet away, he went through a series of gestures that plainly indicated the desire of himself and fellows that their visitors from the heavens accompany them back into the curious pot-like affairs sheltered by those raised caps. With insinuating creasings of countenance, which probably did duty for a smile, the leader was inviting them to descend to the lunarites' regular habitat, possibly an underground metropolis.

The idea was not without appeal, for the adventurers had come to study this strange globe, and might even have to depend upon these creatures and their good-will to exist in the end. Yet Philip hesitated to leave Beryl behind. Would she be safer inside the Rocket until he and Donald could return? Or would she be better off with them? And should he ask Donald, or Sanderson, to remain on guard in the Rocket—which? Truly, it had been a mad and terrible mistake to bring Beryl along on this ill-fated trip.

But these considerations were rudely pushed aside by the events that followed swiftly, removing all need for a decision then.

Even as he pondered, Beryl and Sanderson slid down the rope from the Rocket, without respiration masks, evidently having observed, from inside, his and Donald's removal of this apparatus. A rift in the haze showed them wading through the light, melting snow. Beryl's cheeks were glowing with excitement.

The effect of her appearance upon the gaping lunarites was galvanic, startling.

There was an immediate wave of sibilant utterances as they surged forward round their leader, everyone

clamoring for his attention and pointing toward Beryl. Observing their unwonted attention to her, the girl halted uncertainly, and made as if to run back to the Rocket. Then she changed her mind and ran over to Philip, followed by Sanderson.

"What is it? — oh, why are they acting so — so queerly?" she cried, trembling within the circle of a protecting arm he had instinctively thrown about her.

"God knows," he said hoarsely. But he had an idea that her feminine charms were responsible for the strange behavior of these creatures. "You shouldn't have come out here yet, Beryl. Come, we'd best be moving back toward the Rocket. Don—John—let's get under cover before this buzzing swarm makes up its mind to stop us—before it's too late. Something's gone wrong."

They had not covered more than a dozen feet before the swelling gray pack was after them. Too late Philip realized that their retreat had precipitated the very thing he had hoped to avert, had galvanized them into sudden pursuit. With an unexpected agility, the lunarites leaped after and upon the quartet from all sides.

For a seemingly interminable space, Philip fought off a horde of softish gray little men as they charged upon him in waves. Time and time again his fist connected squarely with the slithery heads of his assailants. They would give, much like mush-filled rubber bags, while, with a weird whistling gasp, that lunarite would slip to the ground—only to have two immediately take his place. And beyond the seething gray cordon Philip could see others pouring up from the depths.

Back to back now, he and Donald fought on, a valiant but losing battle. For, despite their superior strength as compared to that of the lunarites, it was plainly but a question of time before the gray horde would have worn them out, overwhelmed them. Already Sanderson, Philip saw from a corner of his eye, was buried under a flailing pile of lunarites. And Beryl, he suddenly saw, with a wave of wretchedly impotent fury, being borne away, struggling bravely, by a half-dozen gray men toward one of the underground apertures.

All but overpowered by the entwining fingers and arms, he tore himself loose once more, with a hitherto untapped reserve of strength born of desperation and berserk rage. Loth at first to use his automatic, for fear of irretrievably antagonizing these beings, he now managed to reach and draw it. He gave a yell of hate and poured a leaden stream into the surging bodies.

For a few seconds the lunarites fell back. Several of their number writhed, hissing, in the snow among the others who had previously been beaten down to death or insensibility. Donald, following Philip's lead, had emptied his gun into the horde.

Beryl had disappeared.

Their respite, however, was brief. With renewed fury, the lunarites were upon them again. An earthy odor of underground places was in Philip's nostrils as he was borne down under the weight of countless twining, musty bodies. He was conscious of a cooling froth of snow as his face was ground into the hard soil underneath; then sudden oblivion.

CHAPTER 8

A PECULIAR tingling sensation attended Philip's return to consciousness—like hundreds of needle-points pressing against his skin all over. Lacking the power to open his eyes for the time, he groped blindly in the space before him. Then, abruptly, his numbed brain wrenched loose from its mysterious fetters.

At first, as his eyelids fluttered open, it seemed to him that he was floating, unsupported, in space. A

strange gray-green luminousness glowed directly over him, like a low-hanging, iridescent cloud. Then he perceived that this was not cloud-like at all, but, instead, a phosphorescent ledge of some sort about four feet above him. Almost he could reach up and touch it. But he dared not, for fear of some fatal force that might be connected with it. A musty stench pervaded the air he breathed.

He began to investigate cautiously, feeling about him. His fingers came into contact underneath with a moist, flat surface, not unlike wet sand. Twisting his head about clumsily, for he was still numb and stiff, he saw that he was lying in a long, narrow chamber whose length on one side—the side on which he lay—was paralleled by the glowing strip overhead. At the other side a black chasm yawned above and below.

It rather surprized him to find himself unbound, but he was willing to accept this favor of fate without question for the present. His head throbbed painfully. He raised himself on his elbows with an effort. It was then he discovered that the "chasms" above and below along the other side of the narrow chamber were not chasms at all, but merely had appeared that way beyond the glow immediately above him. He saw now, too, that there was a low, dark roof over the whole, just above the iridescent ledge; while, in the shadows, about a yard below the shelf on which he lay, there was a floor.

As he glanced back under the long, glowing roof, it seemed to him that curious protuberances of various sizes showed above the shelf's surface—not unlike dark toadstools pushing up through the substance that comprised it, except that here and there in the dim distance the sizes and shapes were larger and confused. Something pernicious and dread seemed to pervade the very air about him—he knew not what; something beyond the limits of his earthly imagination.

Ignoring the aching throughout his body, doubtless due to the mauling he had received at the hands of the lunarites in his terrific battle with them, he lowered himself slowly over the edge until his feet touched the floor.

As he stood up stiffly, a familiar figure groped toward him out of the gloom, startling him sharply, for his nerves were on razor edge.

"Donald!" he exclaimed, grasping his friend by the shoulders. "Thank God you're safe. But Beryl—what have they done with her! And Sanderson?"

"That's what I want to know as badly as you. I was knocked out completely right after you went down. They must have taken us for a couple of mushrooms—'planting' us in this crazy joint. So help me, it looks like a blamed toadstool cavern. Did you notice how that queer light up there seemed to prick your skin? Bet that's some invention of these confounded lunarites that makes things grow double quick. Maybe they laid us out under it to give its strange power a chance to revive us. Must take us for a couple of eggplants."

"The thing that concerns me right now is finding our way out of this place and reaching Beryl and Sanderson before it's too late. Let's try this way first."

And he led the way down the slender chamber toward its unseen end, or toward what he felt must be an end of it.

They had proceeded no more than a dozen yards when a shadowy form suddenly loomed before them. While Philip was still debating whether or not to leap upon and throttle this form first and investigate afterward, the creature hissed a single syllable that obviously was a command to halt.

Philip hesitated. They might sub-

due this creature quietly and return the way they had come, in hope of finding that direction unguarded. Then he reflected that that way was no doubt guarded as well, if it led outside. Might as well go along with this lunarite and try to find out from his fellows what had been done with Beryl and Sanderson.

Then another lunarite appeared as noiselessly as the first and took up a position in back of them. In this order they followed the other through a side opening that had escaped their notice.

Presently they emerged into what Philip, at first glance, took to be outdoors. Upon closer observation, however, he perceived that they stood in another cavern, but one so vast, so amazing in its proportions, that the walls were all but invisible in the faintly luminous atmosphere that enveloped them. Like the blue tint of earthly skies, this luminosity was not perceptible immediately around them, but it could be seen plainly when looking through distant volumes of it—a greenish tint about the same depth as our own blue sky. While it did not have the brilliance of the ledge in the long chamber they had left behind, it was of sufficient intensity to light the surroundings clearly.

Still following their guide, with the second lunarite watchfully bringing up the rear, they passed for some time through curious gray throngs of lunarites along a thoroughfare formed by squat, hexagonal, tent-like abodes.

"These bimbos must not have any kids at all," remarked Donald. "I haven't seen anything but the one size—except that taller one that made the powwow with us when we first landed among these misbegotten creatures."

"I was wondering about the same thing," said Philip thoughtfully. "Hello—'talk about the devil——'"

Before a larger and different-hued tent, within a semicircle of attendants, some of whose heights approached but did not quite reach him, stood the lunarite whom our adventurers had originally seen by the Rocket at the head of that threatening gray crowd. At any rate, he appeared to be the same one, for Philip recognized the colors and the style of his apparel. Color seemed to be at a painful premium in this drab world, for there was no break in the monotonous gray in everything about all the others, including their tents, with the exception of several of the attendants closest to this personage—probably dignitaries of a sort, or possibly his kin, if, indeed, these queer people knew such a relationship.

Philip and Donald were directed to enter the large abode, through a door covered with a flap made of the same coarsely woven fiber that Philip had observed was the texture of the walls of all the tent-like houses along their way here.

They were preceded inside by the leader and his attendants, the latter squatting on the floor at the sides and rear of their chief. Chairs, the lunarites seemed to know nothing about. Indeed, the adventurers were to learn that one of the secrets of these creatures' maintaining an existence on this all-but-dead world was their willingness to dispense with anything and everything that was not absolutely essential to life. Of luxuries they knew none, nor many of the things we consider essential in our own somewhat pampered existence.

Like the rest, the leader squatted upon the hard, dry ground, indicating by gestures that Philip and Donald should do likewise.

At a sign from the leader, an attendant approached them and began to sketch, with what looked like a stout twig, upon the smooth surface of the ground before them. Philip followed, with fascinating gaze, the motions of those gray, twisted fingers which were so much like gnarled vines

wrapped round the smaller, straighter twig they held.

Displaying surprizing skill as an artist, the lunarite rapidly drew a recognizable likeness of a woman, which, from her familiar, earthly garb, Philip instantly knew represented Beryl.

The sketch of a man followed, the lunarite pointing from it to Philip. Another was drawn to represent Donald. Still another followed. This, by gestures and sundry hissings, in addition to its added height, they recognized as the absent Sanderson.

Apparently satisfied that their visitors had followed these "writings" thus far, the lunarites proceeded with what was clearly a recounting of the individual adventures of the quartet, following their capture. Beryl, it seemed, had been brought to this very abode—was a prisoner in the adjoining room!

Sanderson, it seemed, had been selected as leader of the invaders, by reason of his tallness. The latter characteristic, the adventurers were to learn, was the one conclusive distinction by which the lunarites recognized their own leaders and these leaders' autocratic rule. Hence their automatic selection of Sanderson, who stood six feet one and a half inches without his shoes—two and one half inches taller than Philip, whose near six feet topped the stocky Donald by a similar margin. Donald himself topped the lunarites' leader by nearly a foot.

By reason of the lunarites' selection of Sanderson, it appeared that the latter was to be accorded consideration due a visiting dignitary, despite the fracas attending their reception. He was even now being attended as befitted a leader—so sketched the busy, resourceful artist.

"Well, wouldn't that make your grandma's chilblains ache?" muttered Donald.

"More power to Sanderson, if it proves a means of his protecting Beryl from these fiends, Don."

"I guess you are right at that, Phil," agreed the other, doubtfully, but concentrating once more on their artist-interpreter's picture-story.

However, it appeared that the story was at an end. Informing them that he was to be their instructor in the lunar tongue, the artist turned and addressed his leader, evidently telling him that his task of the moment was completed. The leader turned and gave an order to two of his attendants. These got up quickly, one disappearing into the other room, the other passing outside.

Almost at once the first attendant reappeared. With him was a girl.

"Beryl!" cried Philip, striding toward her.

But his path was barred at once by several attendants.

"Oh, Phil!" she cried, dropping her hands back at her sides resignedly as she looked at him with beseeching eyes.

At a gesture from the leader, she sat down on the ground beside the latter. It was at this juncture that Sanderson, accompaied by the other attendant, entered.

Throwing a glance toward Philip and Donald without attempting to speak to them, Sanderson stalked over to where Beryl and the leader sat. Bowing uncertainly before the latter, he smiled down on her. Neither spoke, however, for the interpreter had come forward again at a sign from his master, and now prepared to "talk" with Sanderson by means of his sketches.

A few minutes of this, and Sanderson turned to Philip.

"Phil," he said, "they want me to say to you that to me, as chief of this expedition, they are assigning this house, with you and Don as my fellow boarders. Guess there's no use arguing the leadership point with them for the present. Beryl is to

share the place with us. She will have the inner room."

"It's O. K. with me," said Philip. "Sounds too easy to be true. But we'll have to be on our guard for their next move."

The lunarites' "next move," however, was not to come at once. As Philip suspected, there was a definite reason behind this temporary change in treatment by them, and their own apparent freedom. What that reason was, and its ultimate climax, was yet to be revealed, and that in startling fashion.

CHAPTER 9

DURING the days that followed—or what the adventurers counted as days by their watches and a system of notches cut in a pole inside their abode—their instruction in the lunar tongue continued. Between these group lessons, they walked about the subterranean domains of the lunarites at will, though never without a special escort supplied by the leader, who, they learned, was known as Sarl.

That Beryl's appearance among the lunar populace elicited nothing more than a craning of scrawny necks now, and stealthy, sidelong glances, indicated that the gray men were held in leash through a fear engendered by strict orders from their leader that she be unmolested in any way.

The adventurers had learned to eat the gray ones' food after all. This was by reason of necessity, since they no longer had access to their own food supply in the Rocket, permission to return to it being politely but firmly denied them. The meager emergency supply they had carried in condensed form in their pockets soon had been depleted. The lunar menu, while monotonous and uninviting in appearance, proved to be not so bad after all. It consisted of various root-like growths on the order of our own rutabagas, yams and such, all grown in these subterranean regions. The disconcerting characteristic of all these was their almost uniformly gray color, their sole range in tint being from a light grayish green to a deep purplish gray. For a beverage, they had their choice of a sulfurous water or a heady wine prepared from one of the various root foods. They stuck to the water, evil-tasting though it was. They grew accustomed to it in time, even to the hard fiber pads that did duty for beds on the unresisting ground.

Meantime, they were finding out much of interest about their captors and their means of living. They learned, for instance, that, except for a comparatively short time following the rising of the sun, and a correspondingly brief time immediately prior to its setting, the lunarites must shun the outside of their globe, because of the extreme cold that prevailed during the long night, but especially because of the extreme heat during all but the very beginning and ending of their equally long day; in this latitude and region at any rate.

As for the "vegetation" suggested by the progressive shades within the crater Eratosthenes and other crater beds, as observed from the earth, it was learned that this growth was but that of rank, weedy things—like the scrub of our own deserts. The melting snows and the periodical vapors did, indeed, feed these growths, but the lunarites derived no nourishment from them. They did manage, however, under severe hardship, to gather hurriedly, immediately after sunrise and just before sunset, some of the weedy growth for weaving the coarse fabric that comprised the walls of their abodes. And, with greater care and skill, they produced a refinement of this fabric in somewhat softer weaves for their meager, drab garments.

Thus Sanderson's botanical talents had little chance for exercise—even

had his activities of intrigue offered that opportunity or inclination.

As a result of the extremes of heat and cold, the lunarites had been forced to perfect many ingenious devices for existing underground. One of these was the mysteriously controlled electric energy with which they were able to charge the air throughout their principal domains, which caused it to glow with the soft light Philip had first observed upon entering the vast main cavern that formed the largest single chamber of these creatures' domains, though this huge chamber or cavern, they learned, was but one of the many immense extinct craters that honeycombed the moon's crust. These caverns had been cleared, enlarged, and linked together by previous generations.

For machinery and such devices as the outlet caps at the moon's surface, the lunarites used a strange dark plastic substance mined from the deeper regions, and which set to iron-like hardness when long exposed to the air.

Incidentally, being well below the surface, the air in these caverns was denser than in the rare atmospheric pressure above. Therefore it provided more normal breathing conditions.

Among the things that Philip most desired to learn was the purpose of certain chambers with huge doors that always remained locked. Other parts of these queer domains were open to the adventurers' inspection; caverns containing strange machinery and devices that had to do with the artesian water supply, lighting, heat from vast volcanic depths, and so on. But the story behind those ever-bolted gray doors intrigued Philip. To his queries of their interpreter and teacher he had obtained but vague replies. This but whetted his curiosity the more.

"There is something beyond those doors that they have good reason to conceal from us," he confided to Donald.

Philip had carefully refrained from discussing anything in Beryl's hearing that might alarm her. And he and Donald had tacitly come to a considering of these things independently of Sanderson, who seemed more interested in his own prestige with the lunar dignitaries, and in Beryl, than in their general welfare and future.

"Yes, and your humble star-dust twin intends to plumb the dark mystery of those dens, or bust," proclaimed the other.

"But 'how' is the question," said Philip. "Something tells me that if we fail to discover their secret before long, none of us may ever have an opportunity. I have a hunch that——"

"Cheese it—old Eggplant is nigh," warned Donald, nudging Philip as the figure of Azan, the interpreter, appeared in the doorway of their abode. This caution was not altogether amiss, for Azan had, in teaching them the lunar tongue, learned much about their own. They could no longer talk within his acute hearing without reserve.

"*Voja*—greetings, my friends," he squeaked, rolling his over-large gourd-like head grotesquely from side to side in the lunar fashion of salaam. "It is time for our talk again. But already you have learned most of what I can teach you—you and the magnificent taller one, and his lovely ward. They are——"

"Here I am, Azan," interrupted Sanderson, entering at that moment.

Azan wriggled convulsively in greeting to Sanderson's six feet plus, while Donald and Philip looked on amusedly, albeit with a liberal sprinkling of sarcasm on the part of the former.

"And the beautiful maiden," pursued the lunarite; "will she be here presently?" His wall-eyes gleamed like those of an octopus.

"She sends her excuses, Azan," said Sanderson with a proprietary air that made Philip wonder all at once

why he had ever chosen this man for a companion on their weird journey. Of late Sanderson's monopoly of Beryl's time and attention had begun to wear on his nerves sharply.

"She does not care to listen to mere words today," Philip put in firmly; "nor do we."

Azan looked from him to Sanderson, then back again with puzzled stare. Philip's manner evidently impressed him, for he favored him with careful attention then. As for Philip, he had suddenly decided that it was time he had asserted himself and halted all this foolish parleying, which was getting them nowhere.

"Harken to me, Azan," he went on. "We have been here thirty-five days and nights—as we reckon them in our own world; more than a day and a night of yours. Beryl—the maiden—needs sunlight, open air. We all do. We can not live in artificial light indefinitely as you can, or on the food that nourishes you. Tell your leader, this Sarl, that we must get back to our space-machine. That we must send a message to our planet to tell them we are safe; else others in countless other machines will follow us here." He might as well make it strong. He would be doubted, but the lunarites could not know for certain whether he lied. It was not beyond the bounds of lunar imagination that the friends of these earth-beings might follow in similar conveyances, to avenge any harm done them.

"I will go to tell him, my friends," wagged the gray one, backing out precipitately. This unexpectedly brusk reception and Philip's disturbing statements had shaken him and upset his ideas badly.

SANDERSON had looked on in silence. As Azan disappeared, however, he found his tongue.

"Now you've done it," he growled. "Why couldn't you have been patient a little longer? Jealous because these people want to treat me like the boss? You'll——"

"Aw, give your tonsils a rest," Donald interjected. "There are things I'll bet you haven't even guessed about our little social spell here, thanks to your heavy interest in living up to the 'head-man' part. Our wriggly visitor who just went out let slip hints of some queer things once or twice when you weren't present—things that I'd say don't make the outlook exactly attractive from Beryl's standpoint."

"For instance——"

"For instance, these squashes are a hybrid race."

"I knew that."

"All right. Maybe you also knew that their average life span is about seven years."

"Seven years! Why, how can they possibly learn to accomplish the things they do in so short a time? Besides, what has that to do——"

"Just this—oh, cripes! You tell him, Phil. I'm no good at wedging facts into a wooden head."

"It's like this, John," Philip explained. "First, if these beings live but seven years, they must mature from eight to ten times as rapidly as we, and they learn and do accordingly, out of necessity as well as by instinct. Besides, everything they do is simplified to the nth degree—not a single non-essential move or consideration of any kind is countenanced. Their language, even, consists of but a scant two or three hundred elemental syllables.

"Now, about the other things: You've noticed, of course, the peculiar characteristic of their arms and hands, particularly the latter?"

"Like growing things—thick grapevines, for instance, with tendrils at the end?"

"You've got the idea. And their legs—shapeless and straight like saplings."

"You mean——"

"——that I believe these creatures represent a phenomenon totally different from anything we have ever imagined in our earthly scheme of animal life. They evidently are a living, breathing and thinking *combination of plant and animal life!* Heaven knows just how they reproduce, but there is their unique command of atmospheric electrical energy — and those novel growing-beds with that energy intensified over them. I'm practically certain now that those curious shapes were what I glimpsed in the dim shadows when I regained consciousness in that long chamber. They were not toadstools but——"

"God! You can't believe that human beings may be spawned and grown like—like mushrooms!"

"I think it possible—in view of what we observed, and with information this Azan has let slip. Evidently, too, like the common house-fly, these beings reach practically full growth at the outset, which would explain why we have seen no 'children'.

"However, what is of vital concern to us, a hellish obsession seems to have taken hold of them, that Beryl—you remember their instinctive and spontaneous reaction to her attraction when she and you stepped out of the Rocket? An instinct that has been held in check since solely by rigid orders from their leader."

"Why the Sam Hill couldn't you have stayed inside a little longer that time?" put in Donald, scowling at Sanderson in anything but a ministerial manner. "The sight of a woman simply set that mob wild."

"Yes, I remember," defiantly. "What of it?"

"Just this: Azan has hinted that the lunarites believe Beryl holds the key to their own release from a strictly tabloid existence—bound by roots and soil. In her presence, they scent some mad possibility not only of increasing their life's span to something approaching our own, but a chance to rise above the soil as a factor in their creation. And their hellish minds have conceived a plan. . . . *Now* do you begin to understand the fate that hovers over her while we dawdle here?"

All three were silent for a time. Even Sanderson seemed to forget his egoism, in contemplation of the fiendishness of this plan of the creatures who held them all in their power.

Two thoughts were paramount in Philip's mind: that Beryl be kept in ignorance of this thing, and that they must make a bold move to get her beyond the clutches of these fiends. How to achieve the latter was the question. As yet he could think of no practical plan. But he would. He must!

All at once he realized that this girl was more precious to him than his life—than anything; that he loved her madly. Strange, how love struck that way—like a bolt of lightning. Incongruously, a humorous saying came to him—something he had heard years ago in a stage farce: "Love grows and grows—like a vegetable." That was it. His love for Beryl had been just growing and growing, quietly, unnoticed almost, like—a vegetable. And now it had developed with disconcerting completeness and abruptness into unmistakable maturity, nurtured by the dew of imminent danger.

Hitherto he had been conscious only of a warm liking for Beryl, attended by a feeling of jealousy, which he had mentally branded as a foolish, unwarranted condition, over her tolerance of Sanderson's attentions. But a full realization of this terrible danger that threatened her now had fired his blood; had suddenly fanned that dormant passion of love for her into full blaze. The thought of Beryl at the mercy of these madmen, these creatures half of animal, half of vegetable kingdoms, made him berserk. Somehow, some way, he must save her. He cursed the feeling of impotence their situation forced upon him. If only

he could conceive a plan, any plan, that had even a one-in-a-hundred chance of success!

In his absorption by this problem he failed to notice Sanderson's departure, and Donald's leaving directly afterward. When he did look up again with seeing eyes, it was to find Beryl contemplating him from the doorway of her room.

"A penny fer them thoughts," she remarked impishly.

"That would be over-pricing them," he answered dully, getting up. "If I got a genuine idea right now, I'd be surprized into fits."

"As bad as that? My, but we are downcast today." Paradoxically, she seemed in unusually fine spirits.

"Please try not to mind my grouch, Beryl," he said, smiling with an effort. He must not let her suspect that dread danger which hung over her. How beautiful she was! That her loveliness should even be gazed upon by these half-human monstrosities maddened him.

She moved toward him, came close and placed a hand on his arm. The nearness of her made his senses reel.

"Why—you are trembling, Phil," she said, surprized and concerned. "Are you ill?"

He patted her hand reassuringly.

"Not ill; just a passing wave of vertigo—probably a bit of biliousness from the long diet of strange food," he lied.

"You must not let yourself get sick," she said solicitously. "After all, we are selfishly depending upon you for guidance in our predicament." She looked up at him with dazzling trustfulness.

"That's just it, Beryl," he groaned. "And I'm a dud. I can't forgive myself for having brought you along on this mad adventure."

"You had little to do with that. I forced myself into this expedition for adventure, excitement; so I have myself to blame—if anyone is to blame. As it is, I am satisfied. We're all in it together now, and together we'll find a way out."

She smiled bravely.

"You're a brick, Beryl," he said, curbing an impulse to sweep her into his arms, to press her soft, pliant body against him and rain kisses upon those dear eyes, those already-paling but still-beautiful cheeks, those alluring lips whose rosiness had not yet succumbed to the lack of sunshine. She swayed against him lightly, perhaps herself a little weak from the enforced confinement, or perhaps impelled by a force akin to that which he felt. The next moment he was doing the very things he had been fighting so hard against!

After a time he released her reluctantly, determinedly.

"I'm sorry, Beryl," he began lamely. Then: "No. I'm damned if I am! I'm glad—*glad!*"

He swept her once more into his arms, and their lips met again as he held her in a long embrace as if fearful to let her go amidst the dangers that surrounded them. And this time she returned his kisses.

"I'm glad, too, Phil," she whispered, a little breathlessly. "And oh, so happy."

Happiness now! Ah, the irony of things, that they should find each other's love at such a time—on the verge of being separated by one of the most dreadful schemes ever conceived by living and thinking beings.

Well, they should not have her alive. He reached for the automatic which he had contrived to keep despite the lunarites' search.

"Promise me you will keep this with you always, dear," he said, "in case of—emergency."

But she handed it back to him.

"I have already thought of that. I carry my own—have ever since we left Mother Earth."

"Good girl," he approved, putting

his own weapon back into the holster inside his shirt. He had thought to strap that extra gun next the calf of his leg before leaving the Rocket, and the lunarites had missed it there in their search. But they had not searched Beryl's person as they had his. There were two guns in the party, anyway. Why, Dame Fortune was actually smiling upon them after all!

He began to take heart. With the knowledge that Beryl loved him, he felt at once confidence—and at the same time more than ever disconcerted—by the dangers they faced. For now she was more precious than ever to him.

A sound of running outside startled him into consciousness again of their immediate situation.

Weird and fantastic were the adventures of the voyagers among the lunarites, as described in next month's WEIRD TALES

IN THE VALLEY

By BERTRANDE HARRY SNELL

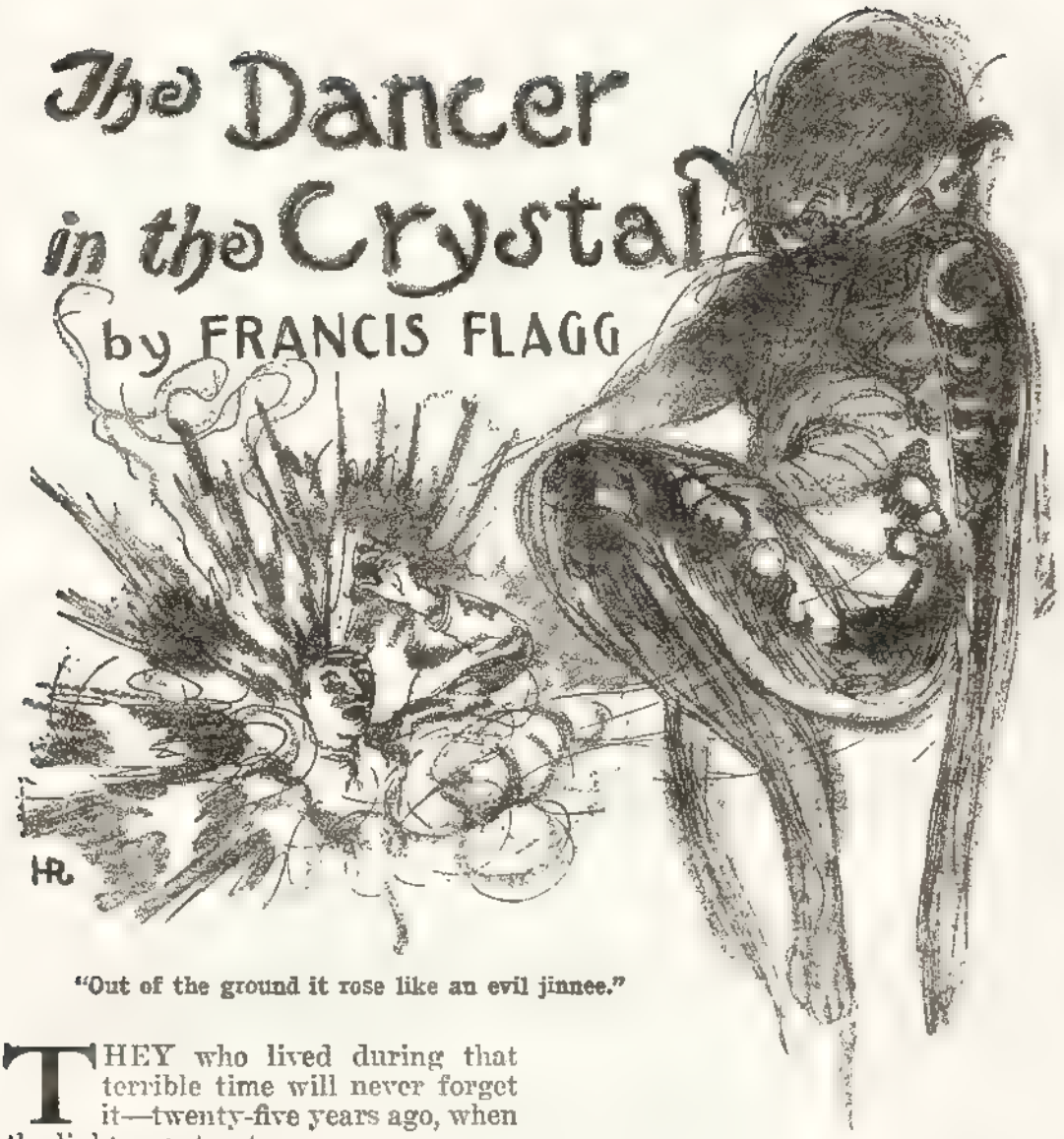
I have seen the Valley of Gibbering Men,
Down where the soulless dwell,
In the viscous sludge of their fog-damned fen
(A horror-haunted Hell);
I have heard the groans of the gruesome ghosts
That paddle about in the slime,
And watched the dance of the Hoary Hosts,
In their palsied pantomime.

The rheum-ribbed rocks of the valley walls,
Where the green ghoul grasses grow,
Hold a horrible lure for the one who falls
Into the pit, below;
He gazes up at their slimy sides,
As he lies in his loathsome den,
And he knows that here he, forever, bides
In the Valley of Gibbering Men.

Hopeless and stricken and rotting they lie,
Damned to Eternity's end;
Retching and wretched, they long to die,
Cursing the eons they spend
Down in the depths where the vermin crawl,
Far from Humanity's ken—
They shudder and shriek when the black gods call,
In the Valley of Gibbering Men.

The Dancer in the Crystal

by FRANCIS FLAGG



"Out of the ground it rose like an evil jinnee."

THEY who lived during that terrible time will never forget it—twenty-five years ago, when the lights went out.

It was in 1941.

All over the world, in the same hour, and practically at the same minute, electrical machinery ceased to function.

The youth of today can hardly realize what a terrible disaster that was for the people of the middle Twentieth Century. England and America, as well as the major nations of Europe, had just finished electrifying their railroads and scrapping the ponderous steam engines which did duty on some lines up until as late as the summer of 1939. A practical method of harnessing the tides and using their energy to develop electricity, coupled with the building of dams and the generating of cheap power through the labor of rushing rivers and giant waterfalls, and the invention of a device for broadcasting it by wireless as cheaply as it was generated, had hastened this electrification. The perfection of a new vacuum tube by the General Electric Company at Schenectady, in the United States, had made gas eco-

nomically undesirable. The new method, by which it was possible to relay heat for all purposes at one-third the cost of illuminating gas, swept the various gas companies into oblivion. Even the steamers which plied the seven seas, and the giant planes that soared the air, received the power that turned their propellers, warmed their cabins and cooked their foods, in much the same fashion as did the factories, the railroads, and the private homes and the hotels ashore. Therefore when electricity ceased to drive the machines, the world stopped. Telegraph, telephone, and wireless communication ceased. Country was cut off from country, city from city, and neighborhood from neighborhood. Automobiles broke down; street-cars and electric trains refused to run; powerhouses were put out of commission; and at night, save for the flickering light of what lanterns, candles, and oil lamps could be resurrected, cities, towns, and hamlets were smothered in darkness.

I have before me the records of that time. It was ten and eleven o'clock in London, Paris, Berlin, and other continental cities when it happened. Restaurants, theaters, hospitals and private homes were plunged into darkness. Mighty thoroughfares that a moment before had glittered and glowed with thousands of lights and wheeling signs became gloomy canyons where people at first paused, questioned, and later plunged through in terrified clamor. Various men who later wrote their impressions for newspapers and magazines say that the thing which shook their nerves the most was the sudden silence which prevailed when all traffic ceased—that, and five minutes later the maddened cries and groans and curses of men and women fighting like wild beasts to escape from crowded restaurants and theaters.

People coursed through the streets shouting to one another that the power-houses had been blown up, that an earthquake had shaken them down. The most absurd statements were made, tossed from mouth to mouth, and added to the general bewilderment and panic. On the street corners religious fanatics suddenly sprang up, proclaiming that the end of the world had come, and that the sinners had better repent of their sins before it was too late. In the hospitals, nurses and doctors found themselves working under a frightful handicap. Gruesome tales are told of doctors caught in the midst of emergency operations. Because of the darkness it was impossible properly to attend the sick. Whenever available, candles, oil lamps and lanterns were pressed into service; but there were pitifully few of these to be had, and nowhere to turn for more. Telephone wires were dead, and automobiles, cars and busses stalled. To add to the horror, fire broke out in various places. There was no way of ringing in an alarm about them, and the fire apparatus could not have responded if there had been. So the fires spread. And the people of those neighborhoods where the flames leapt to heaven, at last had light—the light of their burning homes.

And then in the midst of all this horror and tumult the denizens of the dark, festering spots of the city crept forth. They swarmed from the filthy alleys and from the dives of the professional criminal, furtive-eyed, predatory; and houses were robbed, men killed, and women assaulted. The police were powerless to act; their mobility was gone; burglar alarms did not warn; and the city lay like a giant Samson shorn of its strength.

So that night passed, not for one city alone, but for hundreds of cities!

2

WHILE all this was happening in the old world, chaos gripped the new.

Across the Atlantic, in the eastern

cities of the United States and Canada, and as far west as Montreal and Chicago, the wheels stopped going at that hour when the workers began to pour forth from the factories and shops, and when the late shopping crowds were thronging the trains and the subways. On the surface cars and on the streets there was, of course, no immediate alarm. Moving-picture and vaudeville houses opened wide their doors, raised the blinds on their windows, and evacuated their patrons in good order. But underground in the various tubes and subways it was a different matter. Hundreds of cars bearing thousands of passengers were stalled in stifling blackness. Guards labored heroically to still the rising hysteria and panic. For perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes—in some cases as long as half an hour—they managed to maintain a species of order. But the great pumps and fans that usually circulated fresh air through the tunnels were no longer functioning. When the foul air fogged the lungs, the passengers went mad. Sobbing and cursing and praying, they fought to escape from the cars, as at the same moment the people of Berlin, Paris and London were fighting to escape from restaurants and theaters. They smashed the windows of the coaches, and in wriggling through them impaled the flesh of their bodies, their hands and faces, on jagged slivers of glass. They trampled each other under foot and flowed in terrified mobs along the right of way, searching madly for exits. In New York alone ten thousand of them perished. They bled to death, were crushed, or died of heart-failure and suffocation.

Above ground the streets and avenues were thronged with millions of human beings trying to get home on foot. For hours dense crowds of workers, shoppers and businessmen filled the highways and byways. Here again panic was caused by the crashing planes. In Montreal the Royal Dominion air liner, Edward VII, en route on a non-stop flight from Halifax to Vancouver with four hundred passengers, fell from a height of three thousand feet onto Windsor Station, killing her own passengers and crew, and blotting out the lives of hundreds of people who were in the station at the time. In New York, Boston and Chicago, where the then new magnetic runabouts were making their initial appearance, hundreds of airplanes plunged to the ground, killing and maiming not only their passengers, but the men, women and children on whom they fell. "It was," states an eye-witness in a book he later wrote called *The Great Debacle*, "a sight fit to appall the stoutest heart. Subway exits were disgorging ghastly mobs of clawing people; a crashing plane had turned a near-by street into a shambles; crowds ran this way and that, shrieking, praying. Everywhere was panic."

Panic indeed! Yet the records show that what they could do, the police and fire departments did. Mounted policemen were utilized to carry candles and oil lamps to hospitals, to scour the countryside for every available horse, and to ride through the city in an effort to calm the people. Firemen were marched to various points of vantage, with axes and chemical containers, to combat any fire that might break out. But in the aggregate these precautions amounted to nothing. Whole hospitals passed the night in darkness; patients died by the hundreds; the flames of myriad fires lit up the sky; and rumors ran from mouth to mouth adding to the terror and chaos.

America, screamed the mobs, was being attacked by a foreign power, maybe Japan. The power-houses had been rendered useless by a powerful magnet. There had been a terrible storm down south; all South America was sinking; North America would go next. No one knew anything; everyone knew something. Nothing

was too wild or absurd for millions to believe. Deprived of their accustomed sources of information, the inhabitants became a prey to their own fancies and the disordered fancies of others. Religious fanatics by the light of huge bonfires preached the second coming of Christ and the destruction of the world. Thousands of hysterical people prostrated themselves on the hard street pavements, babbling, weeping, praying. Thousands of others looted wine and strong drinks from the cellars of hotels and cafés and reeled drunken through the streets, adding to the din and the panic. Nor did daylight bring much relief.

For some obscure reason, all over Europe, Asia, and America, during the hours of daylight, the sky was strangely dulled. Seemingly the sun shone with all its usual splendor, but the air was perceptibly darkened. Why this should be so not even the scientists could tell. Yet even under the light of what millions of people on earth believed to be their last day, human wolves came out of their dens and prowled through the cities, sacking stores and private homes, blowing open safes, and killing and robbing with impunity. The day that succeeded the night was more horrible than the night that preceded the day, because hundreds of thousands of people who had slept through the hours of darkness awoke and joined their fellows on the streets, and because there is something terrible about a big city in which no cars run and no factory whistles blow, in which the machine has died.

And while the cities and the inhabitants thereof were given over to madness and destruction, tragedy took its toll of the skies and stalked the seas. The aircraft of the world were virtually wiped out. Only those escaped which were at rest in their hangars, or which by some miracle of navigation glided safely to earth. Hardly a year passes now but that on some wild mountain peak, or in a gloomy canyon or the heart of the Sahara, fragments of those airships are found. Nor did ocean-going vessels suffer less. In the space of twenty hours, two thousand ships of all classes and tonnage met with disaster —disaster that ultimately wiped out the great firm of Lloyds, in London, and a host of lesser insurance companies. Fifteen hundred steamers vanished, never to be heard of more, thirty-five of these being giant passenger boats carrying upward of twenty thousand passengers. Of the other five hundred ships, some were dashed to pieces on inhospitable coasts, others drifted ashore and broke up, and the remainder were abandoned at sea. The fate of the missing steamers may be partly inferred from what happened to the *Olympia* and the *Orania*. This is taken from the account of the second officer of the former ship:

"The night was clear and starry, a heavy sea running. We were forging full speed ahead about two hundred miles off the Irish coast. Because of our electrically controlled gyroscope, however, the ship was as steady as a rock. A dance was being given in both the first and second class ballrooms, the music for them being supplied by the Metropolitan dance orchestra of London. In the third class theater a television moving-picture was being shown. Couples were walking or sitting on the promenade decks as, though a stiff breeze was blowing, the night was warm. From the bridge I could see the *Orania* coming toward us. She made a wonderful sight, her port-holes gleaming tier on tier, and her deck lights glowing and winking, for all the world looking like a giant glowworm or a fabulous trireme. Doubtless, to watchers on her bridge and decks, we presented the same glorious sight, because we were sister ships, belonging to the same line, and of the same build and tonnage. All the time she was coming

up I conversed with the first officer on her bridge by means of our wireless phone; and it was while in the midst of this conversation, and while we were still a mile apart and he was preparing (so he said) to have the wheel put over so as to take the *Orania* to starboard of us that, without warning, her lights went out.

"Hardly crediting my eyes, I stared at the spot where a moment before she had been. 'What is the matter with you?' I called through my phone, but there was no answer; and even as I realized that the phone had gone dead, I was overcome with the knowledge that my own ship was plunged in darkness. The decks beneath me were black. I could hear the voices of passengers calling out, some in jest and others in rising alarm, questioning what had happened. 'I can't get the engine room; the ship doesn't answer her helm,' I said, facing the captain, who had clambered to the bridge. 'Quick, Mr. Crowley!' he cried. 'Down with you and turn out the crew. Put men at every cabin door and stairway and keep the passengers off the decks.' His voice thundered into the microphone, which repeated his words through loud-speaking devices in every saloon, cabin, and on every deck of the ship—or should have so repeated them if the instruments had been functioning. 'There is no need for alarm. A little trouble to the engines, and incidentally to the dynamos, has caused the lights to go out. I beg of you to be calm. In a half-hour everything will be fixed.' But even as I rushed to obey his orders, even as his crisp voice rang out on the night air, I saw the enormous dark bulk bearing down on us, and the heart leapt in my throat. It was the *Orania*, helpless, without guidance, as were we ourselves, rushing ahead under the momentum acquired by her now stilled engines.

"She struck us, bow on, to one side, shearing through steel plates as if they were so much cheese. At that terrific impact, in the dark and the gloom, all order and discipline were swept away. Something had happened to the gyroscopes, and the ships were pitching and tossing, grinding and crashing against each other, our own ship settling by the head, the stern rising.

"Then ensued a terrible time. The night became hideous with the clamor of terrified voices. Maddened passengers fought their ways to the decks, and to the boats. Crowded boats went down into the surging waves bow on or stern first, spilling their human freight into the sea. Hundreds of passengers, believing that the steamers would at any moment sink, leapt overboard with life-preservers, and in nearly all cases were drowned. All this in the first thirty minutes. After that the panic ebbed; it turned into dull despair. The crews of both steamers, what could be rallied of them, began to control the situation.

"Morning found the *Orania* practically intact, only making water in her No. 1 compartment. The *Olympia* forward compartments were all flooded, taking her down at the head, but the rear eight still held intact, and as long as they did so she could not sink. If the passengers had, from the beginning, remained calm and tractable, hardly a life need have been lost."

The second officer of the *Olympia* goes on to point out that both the giant liners had been thoroughly equipped with the most modern of electro-mechanical devices for use in emergencies; that they carried twin power-receiving engines; that they were electrically steered; and that from the pilot-house and the bridge communication could be had, and orders and instructions given, to crew and passengers in every part of the ships. It was, he points out, the sudden and startling going out of the lights, and the totally unexpected breakdown of all machinery, which

precipitated the tragedy, and not any negligence on the part of the officers and the crews.

Such is the story of one marine disaster; but the records are full of similar accounts, hundreds of them, which it is needless to set down here.

3

ON THE Pacific coast, especially in the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco, better order was maintained than in the big cities of the Middle West and the East. Panic there was, loss of life, and damage to property both from fire and theft, but not on so colossal a scale. This was due to the fact that the authorities had several hours of daylight in which to prepare for darkness, and because in the two cities mentioned there were no subways to speak of. In the downtown districts clerks and businessmen were advised to stick to their offices and stores. Policemen, mounted and afoot, were sent to the residential districts and to the factories. Instead of allowing the workers to scatter, they formed them into groups of twenty, deputized, armed, and as nearly as possible set to patrolling the streets of the neighborhoods in which they lived. These prompt measures did much to avert the worst features of the horrors which swept New York and Chicago and the cities of Europe and Asia. But in spite of them the hospitals knew untold suffering, whole city blocks were destroyed by flames, religious frenzy ran high, and millions of people passed the hours of darkness in fear and trembling.

I was twenty-two at that time, living in Altadena, which is a suburb of Pasadena, about twenty miles from Los Angeles, and trying to write. That morning I had taken a book and a lunch and climbed up the Old Pole Road to the top of Mount Echo, intending to return by the cable car which for years has operated from the purple depths of Rubio Canyon to the towering peak. I reached the top of the mountain after a steep climb, ate my lunch on the site of the old Lowe Observatory, and then became absorbed in my book.

The first inkling I had that something was wrong was when the light darkened. "It's clouding over," I thought, looking up, but the sky overhead was perfectly clear, the sun particularly bright.

Not a little disturbed in mind, and thinking, I must admit, of earthquakes, I strolled over to where a group of Mexican section workers, under the supervision of a white boss, had been doing some track repairing. The Mexicans were gesticulating and pointing to the cities and the countryside rolling away far beneath us. Now usually on a clear, sunny day there is a haze in the valley and one can not see for very many miles in any direction. But on this day there was an unwonted clarity in the air. Everything on which we gazed was sharply etched—no blurring, no fogging of lines. The houses stood out starkly; so did the spires of churches and the domes of public buildings. Though it was miles away to the westward, the mighty tower of the Los Angeles city hall could be plainly seen. The light had darkened, yes; but the effect was that of gazing through slightly tinted glasses.

"What do you think it means?" I asked the track boss. But before he could make a reply, a Mexican cried out volubly, pointing one shaking hand up the steep ridge which rose behind us and crossing himself rapidly with the other.

It was an awe-inspiring sight on which we gazed. Over Mount Lowe a luminous, dancing light was growing. I did not know it then, but as far east as Denver and Omaha, and as far south as St. Louis and Galveston, men saw that light. Seen from the western cities of Calgary and Edmonton in Canada it was a pillar of blue flame

growing out of the earth and, as the hours passed, mounting higher and higher into the heavens. Millions of eyes from all over the United States and the Dominion fearfully and superstitiously turned toward that glow. As night deepened upon the Pacific coast, the inhabitants of Southern California saw the sky to the north of them cloven asunder by a leaping sword. No wonder millions of people thought that the heavens had opened and Christ was coming.

But before night I had descended the steep slope of Mount Echo and walked the trackway into Altadena. Women and men called to me from doorways and wanted to know if there was a forest fire farther back in the hills. I could give them no answer. On Lake Avenue I saw the automobiles, street-cars, and motor-busses stranded.

"What is the matter?" I asked a conductor.

"I don't know," he said. "There isn't any power. They say all the power plants and machinery have stopped. A man rode through from downtown a few minutes ago and told us so."

I walked on into Pasadena. Everything was tied up. The streets were jammed with cars and people. Owing to the state ordinance which made it a penal offense for planes to fly over any Californian city—the air routes were so arranged, and the landing-stations and fields outside the cities, access to them being had by fast electric trains—the horror of airships falling on crowded city streets and on residences was entirely averted. People spoke, however, of having seen a huge air liner and some smaller pleasure planes plunging to earth to the west of them, turning over and over; and afterward I learned that the New York-Los Angeles special, which had just taken the air, had crashed into an orchard with a terrible loss of life.

I went no farther than Madison Street on Colorado Boulevard and turned back. It was ominous to look from the windows and porches of the big house that night and see the city black and formless beneath us. Usually the horizon to the west and south was illuminated for thirty miles around. Now, save for the dull glare of several fires, the darkness was unbroken.

Everything that happened that night is printed indelibly on my memory. Far off, like the sound of surf beating on a rocky shore, we could hear the voice of the mob. It rose and fell, rose and fell. And once we heard the crackle of what we took to be machine-gun fire. In the Flintridge district, I heard later, houses were sacked and looted. Some men defending their homes were murdered and several women badly treated. But in Altadena, up in the foothills, no one suffered any violence. Only once were we alarmed by a procession marching up Lake Avenue, bearing torches and chanting hymns. It was a body of religious fanatics, Holy Rollers, men, women, and children, on their way to Mount Wilson, the better to wait the advent of Jesus. We could hear them shouting and singing, and in the flickering light of the torches, see them frothing at the mouth. They went by, and after that, save for a patrol from the sheriff's office, we saw no one until morning.

Dawn came, but if anything the tension and terror grew greater. All night the threatening simitar of light over the mountains had grown taller and taller—one could see it literally growing—and the sinister brightness of it radiated like molten steel, nor did the coming of daylight dim its radiance.

None of us had slept during the night; none of us had thought of sleep. Haggard-faced we greeted the dawn, and with despair in our hearts realized that the light of day was perceptibly dimmer than it had been the day before. Could this actually be the end of the world? Were those

poor fanatics who had gone by in the night right, and were the heavens opening, as they said? These, and more, were the thoughts that ran through my mind. Then—came the end!

It was 6 p. m. in London, 1 p. m. in New York, and 10 o'clock a. m. on the coast when it happened. Millions of people saw the pillar of light waver. For one pregnant moment it grew red-hot, with the crimson redness of heated iron. From its lofty summit jagged forks of lightning leapt across the heavens and blinded the sight of those that watched. Then it vanished, was gone; and a few minutes after its going the street lights came on, the day brightened, telephone bells rang, wheels turned, and the twenty or so hours of terror and anarchy were ended!

4

WHAT had been the cause of it all? No one knew. Learned men puzzled their heads over the problem. Scientists were baffled for an adequate answer. Many explanations were advanced, of course, but none of them held water. For a while there was a tendency on the part of various governments to suspect one another of having invented and utilized a fiendish machine for the undoing of rival nations. However, this suspicion was speedily dropped when it was realized how world-wide had been the nature of the disaster. Dr. LeMont of the Paris Astronomical League advanced the theory that the spots on the sun had something to do with the phenomenon; Doolittle of the Royal Academy of Science in London was of the opinion that the Cosmic Ray discovered by Millikan in 1928 was responsible; while others not so highly placed in the world of science as these two outstanding celebrities suggested anything from a dark comet, a falling meteor, to disturbances in the magnetic centers of the earth. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* for 1962, twenty-one years after the disaster which nearly wrecked civilization and perhaps the world, quotes the above theories in detail, and many more besides, but winds up with the assertion that nothing authentic as to the cause of the tragedy of 1941 has ever been forthcoming. This assertion is not true. In the fall of 1948 there was placed before the Royal Academy of Science in Canada evidence as to the origin of the great catastrophe sufficient to call forth an extended investigation on the part of that body.

Though eighteen years have passed since then, the results of that investigation have never been made public. I will not speculate as to the reason for that. In the interim a report was made of the matter to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, to the Royal Academy of Science in London, and to the Paris Astronomical League in France—a report which these learned bodies chose to ignore. And what was the evidence the Royal Academy of Science in Canada investigated?

As I have already stated, I was in California in 1941 and lived through one phase of the great disaster. Three years later—in the summer of 1944—having broken into the pages of some of the better class magazines with my stories, I made a trip to western Canada for the purpose of writing a series of stories for a western journal. It was there, miles from any city and in the foothills of the Rockies, that I met and listened to the story of the dying recluse. He was a young man, I judged, not a whit older than myself, but in the last stages of consumption.

I came upon the ranch-house—a four-room cabin made of split logs and undressed stone—after a hard day's ride. I pitched my tent on the banks of a tumbling mountain stream about a quarter of a mile from the house, and gladly accepted the invitation of the comely young mistress of the place

to take dinner with them that evening. She was, I gleaned, the sick man's sister. Her husband, now absent rounding up cattle, was proving up on an adjoining quarter section, having already done so on two others in his wife's and brother-in-law's names.

After dinner I sat on the wide veranda with the sick man, whose sleeping-porch I surmised it was, talking with him and smoking my pipe.

"Visitors are rare out this way," he said, "and an educated man a godsend."

I was surprized to find him a man of no little education himself.

"You went to college?" I hazarded.

"Yes, McGill. I took my B. A. And after that, two years of medicine."

Over the plains the sun had sunk in red splendor below the horizon and the sky was on fire with its reflected glory. Nearer in I saw a ragged black splotch on the billowing earth, burnt-looking, charred.

"A prairie fire," I not so much questioned as stated.

The invalid, propped up on his couch, followed my finger with his cavernous black eyes.

"No," he said. "No. That is where *it*—was."

"It?" I queried.

"Yes," he replied; "what the papers called the pillar of fire."

Then I remembered, of course. The burnt splotch was the place where the terrible luminous glow, the cleaving sword I had seen over Mount Lowe, had had its source. I stared, fascinated.

"Nothing," said the man on the couch, "will grow there—since then. The soil has no life in it—no life. It is," he said faintly, "like ashes—black ashes."

Silence fell between us for many minutes. The shadows lengthened and the twilight deepened. It was mournful sitting there in the growing gloom, and I felt relieved when the woman turned on the light in the sitting-room and its cheerful rays flooded through the open windows and the doorway. Finally the invalid said:

"I was here at the time. My sister and her husband were absent on a visit to his folks in Calgary."

"It must have been a stupendous sight," I remarked for want of a better thing to say.

"It was hell," he said. "That's how I got this," tapping himself on the chest and bringing on a fit of coughing. "The air," he gasped; "it was hard on the lungs."

His sister came out and gave him some medicine from a black bottle.

"You mustn't talk so much, Peter; it isn't good for you," she admonished.

He waved an impatient hand, "Let be!" he said. "Let be! What difference does it make? In another day, another week——"

His voice trailed away and then picked up again on a new sentence.

"Oh, don't pity me! Don't waste your pity on the likes of me! If ever a wretch deserved his fate, I deserve mine. Three years now I've suffered the tortures of the damned. Not of flesh alone, but of mind. When I could still walk about it wasn't so bad; but since I've been chained to this bed I've done nothing but think, think. . . . I think of the great disaster; of the hours of terror and despair known by millions of people. I think of the thousands and thousands of men, women and children trapped in subways and theaters, trampled to death, butchered, murdered. I visualize the hospitals full of the sick and the dying, the giant liners of the air and of the ocean crashing, colliding, going down into the sea; and I seem to hear the screams and the pitiful prayers for help of the maddened passengers. Tell me, what fate should befall the fiend who would loose such wo and misery on an unsuspecting world?"

"There, there," I said soothingly,

thinking him delirious, judging his mind unhinged from too much morbid brooding. "It was frightful, of course, but no one could help what happened—no one."

But my words did not calm him. On the contrary they added to his excitement. "That isn't true," he gasped. "It isn't true. No, no, sister, I won't be still, I'm not raving! Give me a drop of brandy—so; and bring me the little cedar box from the cupboard over there."

She complied with his request.

"It's all written down and put away in here," he said, tapping the box. "Put away in here, along with the third crystal which came home in the saddle-bag of John's runaway horse."

His eyes were like two black coals fastened on my face.

"I've told no one," he said tensely, "but I can't keep silent any longer. I must speak! I must!"

One of his feverish hands gripped my own. "Don't you understand?" he cried. "I'm the fiend who caused the great world disaster. God help me! I, and one other!

"No, no," he said, correctly reading the look on my face, "I'm not crazy, I'm not raving. It is God's truth I'm telling you, and the evidence of it is in this cedar box. It began in Montreal when I was going to McGill University. The underprofessor of physics there was a young French-Canadian by the name of John Cabot. He——"

A fit of coughing stopped his voice. His sister gave him a sip of water.

"Peter," she pleaded, "let it go for tonight. Tomorrow——"

But he shook his head. "I may be dead tomorrow. Let me talk now." His eyes sought mine. "Did you ever hear about the meteorite that fell back in Manitoba in 1930?"

"No."

"Nor about the seven crystals that were found in it?"

"I don't remember."

"Well, they were found," he said; "seven of them as large as grapefruit. There's nothing remarkable about finding crystals in a meteorite. That has been done before and since. But those seven crystals were not ordinary ones. They were perfectly rounded and polished, as if by hand. Nor was that all: at the core of each of them was a vibrant fluid, and in that fluid was a black spot——"

A spasm of coughing choked his utterance, and this time I joined with his sister in urging him to rest, but desisted when I saw that such advice, and any effort on my part to withdraw, only succeeded in adding to his painful excitement.

"A black spot," he gasped, "that danced and whirled and was never still. Don't try to stop me! I must tell you about it! The scientists of the world were all agog over them. Where, they asked, had the meteor come from, and what were the fluid and the spot at the center of each crystal? In the course of time the crystals were sent various places for observation and study. One went to England, another to France, two to Washington, while the remaining three stayed in Canada, finally coming to rest in the Museum of Natural Science in Montreal which, as everyone knows, was erected in 1929 and is now under the jurisdiction of McGill University.

"It was during my first year at medical school that I entered the museum one afternoon, almost by accident. The sight of the crystals, newly exhibited, fascinated me. I could hardly tear myself away in time for a lecture.

"The next afternoon I came again. I watched the black spots dancing in their vibrant fluid. Sometimes they would whirl in the center of the liquid with monotonous regularity. Then suddenly they would dash at the walls which held them in and circle them with inconceivable speed. Was it y

imagination, or did the specks take on shape or form? Were they prisoners forever beating their heads against the bars of a cell, seeking to be free? Engrossed in such thoughts I did not know that another had entered the museum until a voice addressed me.

"'So you have come under their spell, too, Ross.'

"I looked up with a start and recognized John Cabot. We knew each other, of course, because I had studied under him for two years.

"'They look so life-like, sir,' I replied. 'Haven't you noticed it?'

"'Perhaps,' he said quietly, 'they are life.'

"The thought stirred my imagination.

"'You know,' he went on, 'that there are scientists who claim life originally came to the earth from some other star, perhaps from outside the universe entirely. Maybe,' he said, 'it came, even as these crystals came, in a meteor.'"

The sick man paused and moistened his lips with water.

"That," he said, "was the beginning of the intimacy which sprang up between John Cabot and me. It was often possible for Cabot to take one of the crystals to his room, and then we would foregather there and ponder the mystery of it. Cabot was a sound teacher of physics, but he was more than that. He was a scientist who was also a speculative philosopher, which meant being something of a mystic. Have you ever studied mysticism? No? Then I can't tell you about that. Only from him and his speculations I struck fire. How can I describe it? Perhaps gazing in the crystal hypnotized us both. I don't know as to that. Only night and day both of us became eaten with an overwhelming curiosity.

"'What do the scientists say is inside the crystals?' I asked Cabot.

"'They don't say,' he replied. 'They don't know. A message from Mars, perhaps, or from beyond the Milky Way.'

"'From beyond the Milky Way,' whispered the sick man. "Can't you see what that would mean to our imaginations?'"

He beat the quilt that covered him with his hand.

"It meant," he said, "the forbidden. We dreamed of doing what the scientists of America and Europe said they hesitated to do for fear of the consequences—or for fear of destroying objects valuable to science. We dreamed of breaking the crystal!"

A big moth fluttered into the radius of light and the dying man followed it with his eyes. "That's what we were, Cabot and I, though we didn't know it; moths, trying to reach a searing flame."

By this time I was engrossed in his story. "What then?" I prompted.

"We stole the crystals! Perhaps you read about it at the time?"

I shook my head.

"Well, it was in all the papers."

I explained that in those days I had seldom seen a paper from one week's end to another. He nodded feebly.

"That accounts for it, then. The theft caused a sensation in university circles, and both Cabot and I were thoroughly questioned and searched. But we had been too clever!" The sick man laughed mirthlessly. "God help us! too clever! What wouldn't I give now," cried Peter Ross bitterly, "if we had been discovered! But a malignant fate ordered otherwise. We were successful. During the holidays I took the crystal home with me, home, to these hills and plains. Later Cabot joined me."

He broke off for a moment as if exhausted.

"I wonder," he said, after a few minutes, "if I can make what we felt and thought clear to you. It wasn't just idle curiosity that was driving us. No! It was more than that. Out of the unknown itself had come a

meteor with a message for mankind. Something stupendous was hidden in the cores of those crystals. Yet what had the scientists of the world done? They had contented themselves with weighing the crystals, looking at them under a microscope, photographing them, writing learned articles about them, and then putting them away on museum shelves! None of them—not one; or so it seemed to us—had had the courage to open a crystal. Their reasons—deadly germs, virulent forms of life, terrific explosions—we dismissed as cowardly vaporings. The time had come, we said, to investigate more thoroughly. God help us," whispered Peter Ross, "we blinded ourselves to what might be the consequences of our rash experiment! We eased our consciences with the reflection that we were safeguarding humanity from any danger by carrying it out in the wilderness, miles from any city or human habitation. If there were to be any martyrs, we thought egotistically, it would be us alone. We had, of course, no inkling of the terrible force we were about to loose.

"Early in the morning of the day of the disaster we rode from this place down there to the plains, down to where you saw that charred splotch. We had with us a portable outfit of chemical instruments. It was our intention to smash one of the crystals, catch the fluid in our test-tubes, isolate the black spot, and make an analysis of it and the liquid later. But we never did," he said; "we never did."

A cough rattled in his throat.

"It was Cabot who broke the crystal. Before noon, it was, but I'm not sure of the time. He knew how to do it; he had all the tools necessary. The crystal lay inside a metal container. I tell you there was something uncanny about it glimmering in the sun! The black spot was whirling madly, dashing itself with violence against the restraining walls as if it sensed that freedom was near.

"'Look at him,' said Cabot tensely. 'Look at him leaping and kicking. What a dancer! What a—in a minute now and he'll be out of that!'

"Perhaps it was the phrase; perhaps it was the masculine pronoun used in connection with the black spot; but suddenly I was afraid of the thing we would do. Fearful possibilities ran through my mind.

"'John,' I cried, stepping back several paces, 'John, don't!'

"But Cabot never heard me. His hand went up with the heavy hammer.

"Poor John! Nothing warned him—nothing stayed him!

"The blow came down. I heard the tinkling crash; then——

"'Oh my God!'

"It was Cabot's voice in a shrill scream of unutterable horror and agony. His bent figure straightened up, and from his hair and his outflung arms blue lights crackled and streamed, and all around his body a column of something shimmered and shifted and grew. So for a moment he postured; then he began to dance. I tell you he began to dance, not by any force or power that resided in his own limbs, but as if he were jerked or writhed about by an external agent. I saw what that agent was. It was the black spot! Out of the ground it rose like an evil jinnee and took on the form and shape of something monstrous, inhuman, horrible. It leapt and whirled; and yes, though I couldn't hear it, it sang and shouted. It was the nucleus of an increasing body of light. I felt searing heat scorch my cheeks and burn my throat with every breath I drew. More! I felt that streaming fingers of light were reaching out at me, clutching.

"With a sob of fear I turned and ran. Cabot's horse had broken loose and was running wildly across the plains. My own was plunging madly

at the end of its picket rope. Somehow I mounted and fled, but after several miles of such flight my horse put its hoof in a prairie-dog hole and broke its leg, pitching me over its head.

"How long I lay dead to the world I don't know; but the long shadows were running eastward when I came to. The air was acrid and bitter. With fearful eyes I saw that the day was unaccountably dark and that the pillar of fire out on the plains had grown to immense proportions. Even as I gazed on it, it grew. Hour after hour it grew, adding to its circumference and height. From the four corners of the horizon, in mighty arches that dipped to a common center, flowed infinitesimal particles of what seemed golden dust. I know now that all the electricity was being sucked out of the air, darkening the day, blackening the night, and rendering all machinery useless. But then I knew only that the pillar of fire, the center to which those particles cohered, was drawing nearer and nearer to where I lay. For I could barely move, my feet seemed like lead, and there was a tight band round my chest.

"Perhaps I was delirious, out of my head; I do not know, but I got on my feet and walked and walked, and when I couldn't walk I crawled. Hours and hours I crawled, driven ahead by a growing horror of the nightmare that pursued me; yet when I stopped, exhausted, I was still far away from the foothills and the pillar of fire was nearer than ever. I could see the monstrous black thing inside of it dancing and whirling. My God! It was reaching out dark streamers of fire after me; it was calling out that it wanted me, that it would have me, that nothing this side of heaven or hell could keep it from me; and as it shot this implacable message into my senses, it grew bigger, it danced faster, and it came closer.

"Again I staggered to my feet and ran. Late night found me several miles below here, quenching my thirst at a spring of water which trickles from the side of a rock. I looked back, and the pillar of fire was now so high that it lost itself in the heavens. All around me played a livid light, a light that flung the shape of a gigantic dancing horror this way and that. Did I tell you that this light was like a pillar? Yes, it was like a pillar whose middle swelled out in a great arc; and I knew that I was doomed, that I could not escape, and swooning horror overcame me and I fell to the ground and buried my face in my hands.

"Hours passed—or was it only minutes? I can not say. I could feel my body writhing, twisting. Every atom of my flesh was vibrating to an unnatural rhythm. I was crazy, yes, out of my head, delirious, but I swear to you that I heard John Cabot crying to me, imploring, 'For God's sake, break the crystal, break the crystal!' and I cried back into my huddled arms, not speaking, yet screaming it, 'We broke the crystal! God help us! We broke the crystal!'

"Then suddenly it came to me that he meant the second crystal. Yes, yes, I understood. The fiendish thing out there on the plain was seeking, not me, but its counterpart.

"The second crystal was in the knapsack still swung on my back. With insane fury I tore it out of its padded, protected housing and whirled it over my head. Filled with loathing of the terrible thing, I flung it from me as far as the strength of my arm would permit. Perhaps twenty yards away it crashed into a rock and was shattered to pieces. I saw the slivers of it glint and flash; then from the spot where it struck rose a column of light, and in the column of light was a whirling speck. Like its predecessor it grew and grew, and as it grew, receded from me in

the direction of the mightier pillar whirling and calling. How can I tell you of the weird dance of the evil ones? They sang to each other, and I know the song they sang, but I can not tell it to you because it was not sung in words.

"At what hour they came together, whether it was day or night, I do not know. Only I saw them merge. With their coming together the terrible power that was sucking in the world's electrical forces to one gigantic center became neutralized. The heavens split open as the bolts of lightning devastated the sky. Through the rent firmament I saw a black shape cleave its way. Whatever had been in the two crystals was leaving the earth, was plunging through the Milky Way, through the incalculable spaces beyond the reach of our most powerful telescopes, back, back. . . ."

Two days later, in a grave beside the tumbling mountain stream, his brother-in-law and I buried all that was mortal of Peter Ross. Over his resting-place we piled a great cairn of rocks so that the spring floods might not wash his body away nor coyotes worry the tomb of the dead. When I parted with the bereaved sister, she pressed me to accept the cedar box.

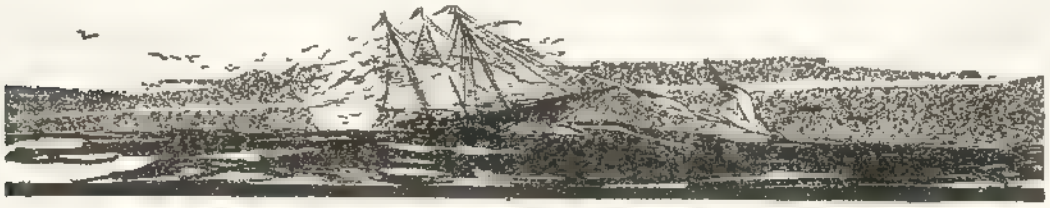
"Poor Peter!" she said. "Toward the last he ran a fever all the time and was delirious; but he wanted you to have the box, and so you must take it."

I saw that she attached no importance to his story.

"He never mentioned it before," she said; "he was out of his head."

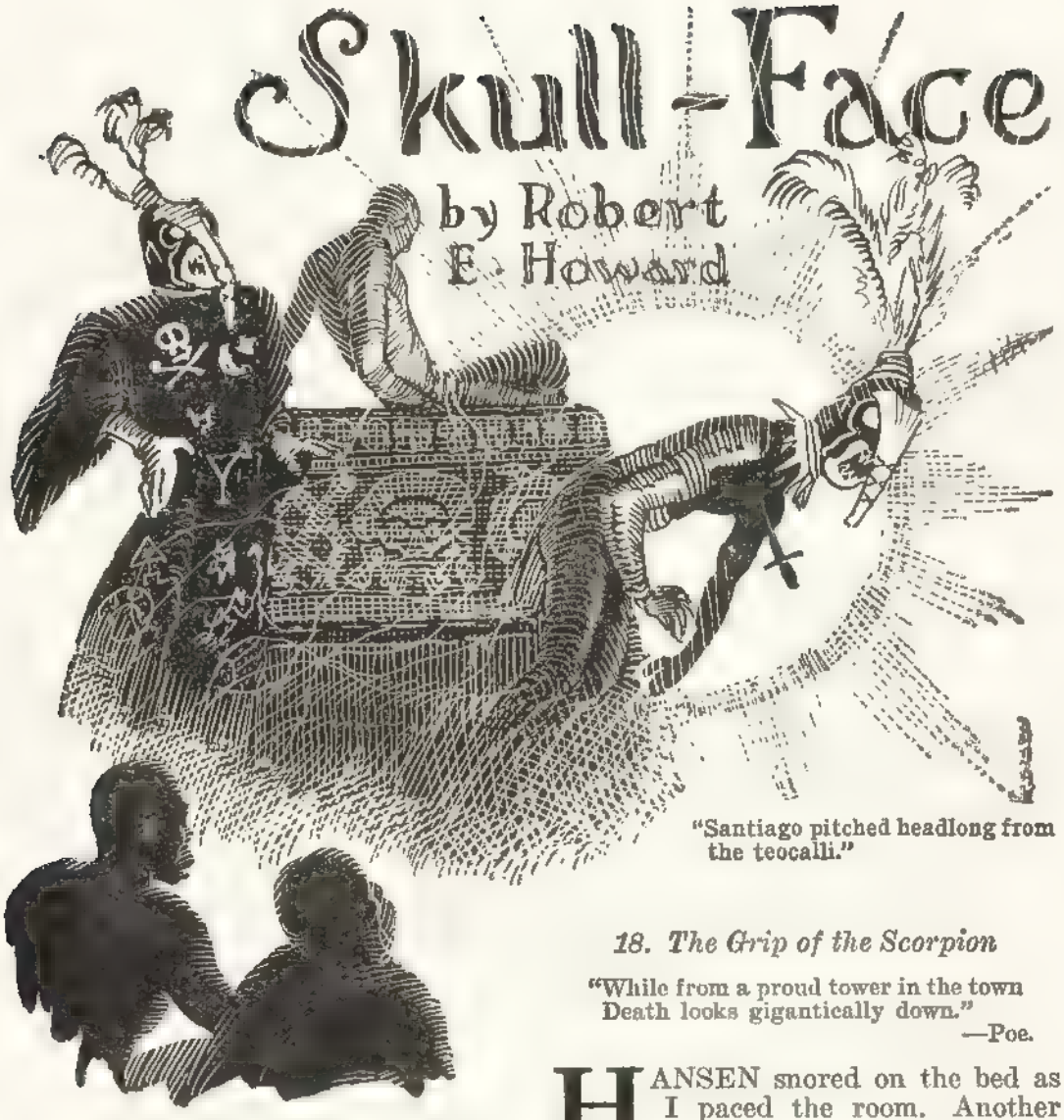
And so I was inclined to believe until I examined the contents of the box. Then I changed my mind. If what he told us had been naught but the result of morbid brooding and delirium, then he must have been morbid and delirious for years preceding his death, because the written version of his story began simply, "It is nearly a year now since," and was a bare recital of facts, written plainly and in the manner of a man with no especial gift for expressing himself in words. Nor was that all. Besides the manuscript mentioned were revealed various letters which I perused, letters from Cabot to Ross, Ross to Cabot, covering a period of years and telling of their ideas and plans and of the theft of the crystals. The whole story, save for its denouement, could be pieced together from those letters.

Incredible as Peter Ross's tale had sounded in the telling, wild and incoherent though it had been, and colored with fever and delirium, none the less it was true. And as if to rout whatever disbelief might be still lurking in my mind, I saw that which finally led me to place the whole matter before the Royal Academy of Science in Canada, and before various other scientific bodies, as I have recorded; and which in this latter day, so that mankind may be warned against the menace imprisoned in the crystals, has made me put everything down here: the crowning evidence of all. For in the bottom of the box was a round object; and when I picked it up my fascinated eyes were held by a transparent bubble the size of an orange with a black spot at its core, dancing, dancing. . . .



Skull-Face

by Robert E. Howard



"Santiago pitched headlong from the teocalli."

The Story Thus Far

A MUMMY-CASE is found floating in the ocean, and taken on board ship. The next day the mummy has disappeared, and the scientist in whose stateroom it was kept is found murdered. Following this, rebellion and unrest seethe throughout Africa and Asia, and rumor says that the old prophecy will soon be fulfilled, that a "Man from the Sea" will overthrow the rule of the whites and establish a black empire. In London's Limehouse district a mummified, leprous-looking man, known to his slaves as the Master, as the Scorpion, and as Kathulos of Egypt, rescues Stephen Costigan (an American dope addict) from his craving for hashish by giving him an elixir so strong that he is racked by fiery tortures when deprived of it. The Master sends Costigan to murder Sir Haldred Frenton, but Costigan gives himself up to John Gordon of the British secret police, and Gordon raids the Master's retreat in Limehouse, but the Master and his fanatics escape through a snake-infested tunnel. Zuleika, one of the Master's slaves, with whom Costigan is in love, has given him enough of the elixir to last him for four days.

18. The Grip of the Scorpion

"While from a proud tower in the town
Death looks gigantically down."
—Poe.

HANSEN snored on the bed as I paced the room. Another day had passed over London and again the street lamps glimmered through the fog. Their lights affected me strangely. They seemed to beat, solid waves of energy, against my brain. They twisted the fog into strange sinister shapes. Footlights of the stage that is the streets of London, how many grisly scenes had they lighted? I pressed my hands hard against my throbbing temples, striving to bring my thoughts back from the chaotic labyrinth where they wandered.

Gordon I had not seen since dawn.

Following the clue of "Soho 48" he had gone forth to arrange a raid upon the place and he thought it best that I should remain under cover. He anticipated an attempt upon my life, and again he feared that if I went searching among the dives I formerly frequented it would arouse suspicion.

Hansen snored on. I seated myself and began to study the Turkish shoes which clothed my feet. Zuleika had worn Turkish slippers — how she floated through my waking dreams, gilding prosaic things with her witchery! Her face smiled at me from the fog; her eyes shone from the flickering lamps; her phantom footfalls re-echoed through the misty chambers of my skull.

They beat an endless tattoo, luring and haunting till it seemed that these echoes found echoes in the hallway outside the room where I stood, soft and stealthy. A sudden rap at the door and I started.

Hansen slept on as I crossed the room and flung the door swiftly open. A swirling wisp of fog had invaded the corridor, and through it, like a silver veil, I saw her—Zuleika stood before me with her shimmering hair and her red lips parted and her great dark eyes.

Like a speechless fool I stood and she glanced quickly down the hallway and then stepped inside and closed the door.

"Gordon!" she whispered in a thrilling undertone. "Your friend! The Scorpion has him!"

Hansen had awakened and now sat gaping stupidly at the strange scene which met his eyes.

Zuleika did not heed him.

"And oh, Steephen!" she cried, and tears shone in her eyes, "I have tried so hard to secure some more elixir but I could not."

"Never mind that," I finally found my speech. "Tell me about Gordon."

"He went back to Kamonos' alone, and Hassim and Ganra Singh took him captive and brought him to the Master's house. Tonight assemble a great host of the people of the Scorpion for the sacrifice."

"Sacrifice!" A grisly thrill of horror coursed down my spine. Was there no limit to the ghastliness of this business?

"Quick, Zuleika, where is this house of the Master's?"

"Soho, 48. You must summon the police and send many men to surround it, but you must not go yourself——"

Hansen sprang up quivering for action, but I turned to him. My brain was clear now, or seemed to be, and racing unnaturally.

"Wait!" I turned back to Zuleika. "When is this sacrifice to take place?"

"At the rising of the moon."

"That is only a few hours before dawn. Time to save him, but if we raid the house they'll kill him before we can reach them. And God only knows how many diabolical things guard all approaches."

"I do not know," Zuleika whimpered. "I must go now, or the Master will kill me."

Something gave way in my brain at that; something like a flood of wild and terrible exultation swept over me.

"The Master will kill no one!" I shouted, flinging my arms on high. "Before ever the east turns red for dawn, the Master dies! By all things holy and unholy I swear it!"

Hansen stared wildly at me and Zuleika shrank back as I turned on her. To my dope-inspired brain had come a sudden burst of light, true and unerring. I knew Kathulos was a mesmerist—that he understood fully the secret of dominating another's mind and soul. And I knew that at last I had hit upon the reason of his power over the girl. Mesmerism! As a snake fascinates and draws to him a bird, so the Master held Zuleika to him with unseen shackles. So absolute was his rule over her that

it held even when she was out of his sight, working over great distances.

There was but one thing which would break that hold: the magnetic power of some other person whose control was stronger with her than Kathulos'. I laid my hands on her slim little shoulders and made her face me.

"Zuleika," I said commandingly, "here you are safe; you shall not return to Kathulos. There is no need of it. Now you are free."

But I knew I had failed before I ever started. Her eyes held a look of amazed, unreasoning fear and she twisted timidly in my grasp.

"Steephen, please let me go!" she begged. "I must—I must!"

I drew her over to the bed and asked Hansen for his handcuffs. He handed them to me, wonderingly, and I fastened one cuff to the bed-post and the other to her slim wrist. The girl whimpered but made no resistance, her limpid eyes seeking mine in mute appeal.

It cut me to the quick to enforce my will upon her in this apparently brutal manner but I steeled myself.

"Zuleika," I said tenderly, "you are now my prisoner. The Scorpion can not blame you for not returning to him when you are unable to do so—and before dawn you shall be free of his rule entirely."

I turned to Hansen and spoke in a tone which admitted of no argument.

"Remain here, just without the door, until I return. On no account allow any strangers to enter—that is, anyone whom you do not personally know. And I charge you, on your honor as a man, do not release this girl, no matter what she may say. If neither I nor Gordon have returned by ten o'clock tomorrow, take her to this address—that family once were friends of mine and will take care of a homeless girl. I am going to Scotland Yard."

"Steephen," Zuleika wailed, "you are going to the Master's lair! You will be killed! Send the police, do not go!"

I bent, drew her into my arms, felt her lips against mine, then tore myself away.

THE fog plucked at me with ghostly fingers, cold as the hands of dead men, as I raced down the street. I had no plan, but one was forming in my mind, beginning to seethe in the stimulated cauldron that was my brain. I halted at the sight of a policeman pacing his beat, and beckoning him to me, scribbled a terse note on a piece of paper torn from a notebook and handed it to him.

"Get this to Scotland Yard; it's a matter of life and death and it has to do with the business of John Gordon."

At that name, a gloved hand came up in swift assent, but his assurance of haste died out behind me as I renewed my flight. The note stated briefly that Gordon was a prisoner at Soho 48 and advised an immediate raid in force—advised, nay, in Gordon's name, commanded it.

My reason for my actions was simple; I knew that the first noise of the raid sealed John Gordon's doom. Somehow I first must reach him and protect or free him before the police arrived.

The time seemed endless, but at last the grim gaunt outlines of the house that was Soho 48 rose up before me, a giant ghost in the fog. The hour grew late; few people dared the mists and the dampness as I came to a halt in the street before this forbidding building. No lights showed from the windows, either upstairs or down. It seemed deserted. But the lair of the scorpion often seems deserted until the silent death strikes suddenly.

Here I halted and a wild thought struck me. One way or another, the drama would be over by dawn. Tonight was the climax of my career, the ultimate top of life. Tonight I

was the strongest link in the strange chain of events. Tomorrow it would not matter whether I lived or died. I drew the flask of elixir from my pocket and gazed at it. Enough for two more days if properly eked out. Two more days of life! Or—I needed stimulation as I never needed it before; the task in front of me was one no mere human could hope to accomplish. If I drank the entire remainder of the elixir, I had no idea as to the duration of its effect, but it would last the night through. And my legs were shaky; my mind had curious periods of utter vacuity; weakness of brain and body assailed me. I raised the flask and with one draft drained it.

For an instant I thought it was death. Never had I taken such an amount.

Sky and world reeled and I felt as if I would fly into a million vibrating fragments, like the bursting of a globe of brittle steel. Like fire, like hellfire the elixir raced along my veins and I was a giant! monster! a superman!

Turning, I strode to the menacing, shadowy doorway. I had no plan; I felt the need of none. As a drunken man walks blithely into danger, I strode to the lair of the Scorpion, magnificently aware of my superiority, imperially confident of my stimulation and sure as the unchanging stars that the way would open before me.

Oh, there never was a superman like that who knocked commandingly on the door of Soho 48 that night in the rain and the fog!

I knocked four times, the old signal that we slaves had used to be admitted into the idol room at Yun Shatu's. An aperture opened in the center of the door and slanted eyes looked warily out. They slightly widened as the owner recognized me, then narrowed wickedly.

"You fool!" I said angrily. "Don't you see the mark?"

I held my hand to the aperture.

"Don't you recognize me? Let me in, curse you."

I think the very boldness of the trick made for its success. Surely by now all the Scorpion's slaves knew of Stephen Costigan's rebellion, knew that he was marked for death. And the very fact that I came there, inviting doom, confused the doorman.

The door opened and I entered. The man who had admitted me was a tall, lank Chinaman I had known as a servant of Kathulos. He closed the door behind me and I saw we stood in a sort of vestibule, lighted by a dim lamp whose glow could not be seen from the street for the reason that the windows were heavily curtained. The Chinaman glowered at me undecided. I looked at him, tensed. Then suspicion flared in his eyes and his hand flew to his sleeve. But at the instant I was on him and his lean neck broke like a rotten bough between my hands.

I EASED his corpse to the thickly carpeted floor and listened. No sound broke the silence. Stepping as stealthily as a wolf, fingers spread like talons, I stole into the next room. This was furnished in Oriental style, with couches and rugs and gold-worked drapery, but was empty of human life. I crossed it and went into the next one. Light flowed softly from the censers which were swung from the ceiling, and the Eastern rugs deadened the sound of my footfalls; I seemed to be moving through a castle of enchantment.

Every moment I expected a rush of silent assassins from the doorways or from behind the curtains or screens with their writhing dragons. Utter silence reigned. Room after room I explored and at last halted at the foot of the stairs. The inevitable censer shed an uncertain light, but most of the stairs were veiled in shadows. What horrors awaited me above?

But fear and the elixir are strangers and I mounted that stair of lurking terror as boldly as I had entered that house of terror. The upper rooms I found to be much like those below and with them they had this fact in common: they were empty of human life. I sought an attic but there seemed no door letting into one. Returning to the first floor, I made a search for an entrance into the basement, but again my efforts were fruitless. The amazing truth was borne in upon me: except for myself and the dead man who lay sprawled so grotesquely in the outer vestibule, there were no men in that house, dead or living.

I could not understand it. Had the house been bare of furniture I should have reached the natural conclusion that Kathulos had fled—but no signs of flight met my eye. This was unnatural, uncanny. I stood in the great shadowy library and pondered. No, I had made no mistake in the houses. Even if the broken corpse in the vestibule were not there to furnish mute testimony, everything in the room pointed toward the presence of the Master. There were the artificial palms, the lacquered screen, the tapestries, even the idol, though now no incense smoke rose before it. About the walls were ranged long shelves of books, bound in strange and costly fashion—books in every language in the world, I found from a swift examination, and on every subject—outré and bizarre, most of them.

Remembering the secret passage in the Temple of Dreams, I investigated the heavy mahogany table which stood in the center of the room. But nothing resulted. A sudden blaze of fury surged up in me, primitive and unreasoning. I snatched a statuette from the table and dashed it against the shelf-covered wall. The noise of its breaking would surely bring the gang from their hiding-places. But the result was much more startling than that!

The statuette struck the edge of a shelf and instantly the whole section of shelves with their load of books swung silently outward, revealing a narrow doorway! As in the other secret door, a row of steps led downward. At another time I would have shuddered at the thought of descending, with the horrors of that other tunnel fresh in my mind, but inflamed as I was by the elixir, I strode forward without an instant's hesitancy.

Since there was no one in the house, they must be somewhere in the tunnel or in whatever lair to which the tunnel led. I stepped through the doorway, leaving the door open; the police might find it that way and follow me, though somehow I felt as if mine would be a lone hand from start to grim finish.

I went down a considerable distance and then the stair debouched into a level corridor some twenty feet wide—a remarkable thing. In spite of the width, the ceiling was rather low and from it hung small, curiously shaped lamps which flung a dim light. I stalked hurriedly along the corridor like old Death seeking victims, and as I went I noted the work of the thing. The floor was of great broad flags and the walls seemed to be of huge blocks of evenly set stone. This passage was clearly no work of modern days; the slaves of Kathulos never tunneled there. Some secret way of mediæval times, I thought—and after all, who knows what catacombs lie below London, whose secrets are greater and darker than those of Babylon and Rome?

On and on I went, and now I knew that I must be far below the earth. The air was dank and heavy, and cold moisture dripped from the stones of walls and ceiling. From time to time I saw smaller passages leading away in the darkness but I determined to keep to the larger main one.

A ferocious impatience gripped me. I seemed to have been walking for

hours and still only dank damp walls and bare flags and guttering lamps met my eyes. I kept a close watch for sinister-appearing chests or the like—saw no such things.

Then as I was about to burst into savage curses, another stair loomed up in the shadows in front of me.

19. Dark Fury

"The ringed wolf glared the circle round
Through baleful, blue-lit eye,
Not unforgetful of his debt.
Quoth he, 'I'll do some damage yet
Or ere my turn to die!'"

—Mundy

LIKE a lean wolf I glided up the stairs. Some twenty feet up there was a sort of landing from which other corridors diverged, much like the lower one by which I had come. The thought came to me that the earth below London must be honeycombed with such secret passages, one above the other.

Some feet above this landing the steps halted at a door, and here I hesitated, uncertain as to whether I should chance knocking or not. Even as I meditated, the door began to open. I shrank back against the wall, flattening myself out as much as possible. The door swung wide and a Moor came through. Only a glimpse I had of the room beyond, out of the corner of my eye, but my unnaturally alert senses registered the fact that the room was empty.

And on the instant, before he could turn, I smote the Moor a single deathly blow behind the angle of the jawbone and he toppled headlong down the stairs, to lie in a crumpled heap on the landing, his limbs tossed grotesquely about.

My left hand caught the door as it started to slam shut and in an instant I was through and standing in the room beyond. As I had thought, there were no occupants of this room. I crossed it swiftly and entered the next. These rooms were furnished in a manner before which the furnishings of the Soho house paled into insignificance. Barbaric, terrible, unholy—these words alone convey some slight idea of the ghastly sights which met my eyes. Skulls, bones and complete skeletons formed much of the decorations, if such they were. Mummies leered from their cases and mounted reptiles ranged the walls. Between these sinister relics hung African shields of hide and bamboo, crossed with assagais and war daggers. Here and there reared obscene idols, black and horrific.

And in between and scattered about among these evidences of savagery and barbarism were vases, screens, rugs and hangings of the highest Oriental workmanship; a strange and incongruous effect.

I had passed through two of these rooms without seeing a human being, when I came to stairs leading upward. Up these I went, several flights, until I came to a door in a ceiling. I wondered if I were still under the earth. Surely the first stairs had let into a house of some sort. I raised the door cautiously. Starlight met my eyes and I drew myself warily up and out. There I halted. A broad flat roof stretched away on all sides and beyond its rim on all sides glimmered the lights of London. Just what building I was on, I had no idea, but that it was a tall one I could tell, for I seemed to be above most of the lights I saw. Then I saw that I was not alone.

Over against the shadows of the ledge that ran around the roof's edge, a great menacing form bulked in the starlight. A pair of eyes glinted at me with a light not wholly sane; the starlight glanced silver from a curving length of steel. Yar Khan the Afghan killer fronted me in the silent shadows.

A fierce wild exultation surged over me. Now I could begin to pay the debt I owed Kathulos and all his hellish band! The dope fired my veins

and sent waves of inhuman power and dark fury through me. A spring and I was on my feet in a silent, deathly rush.

Yar Khan was a giant, taller and bulkier than I. He held a tulwar, and from the instant I saw him I knew that he was full of the dope to the use of which he was addicted—heroin.

As I came in he swung his heavy weapon high in air, but ere he could strike I seized his sword wrist in an iron grip and with my free hand drove smashing blows into his midriff.

Of that hideous battle, fought in silence above the sleeping city with only the stars to see, I remember little. I remember tumbling back and forth, locked in a death embrace. I remember the stiff beard rasping my flesh as his dope-fired eyes gazed wildly into mine. I remember the taste of hot blood in my mouth, the tang of fearful exultation in my soul, the onrushing and upsurging of inhuman strength and fury.

God, what a sight for a human eye, had anyone looked upon that grim roof where two human leopards, dope maniacs, tore each other to pieces!

I remember his arm breaking like rotten wood in my grip and the tulwar falling from his useless hand. Handicaped by a broken arm, the end was inevitable, and with one wild uproaring flood of might, I rushed him to the edge of the roof and bent him backward far out over the ledge. An instant we struggled there; then I tore loose his hold and hurled him over, and one single shriek came up as he hurtled into the darkness below.

I stood upright, arms hurled up toward the stars, a terrible statue of primordial triumph. And down my breast trickled streams of blood from the long wounds left by the Afghan's frantic nails, on neck and face.

Then I turned with the craft of the maniac. Had no one heard the sound of that battle? My eyes were on the door through which I had come, but a noise made me turn, and for the first time I noticed a small affair like a tower jutting up from the roof. There was no window there, but there was a door, and even as I looked that door opened and a huge black form framed itself in the light that streamed from within. Hassim!

He stepped out on the roof and closed the door, his shoulders hunched and neck outthrust as he glanced this way and that. I struck him senseless to the roof with one hate-driven smash. I crouched over him, waiting some sign of returning consciousness; then away in the sky, close to the horizon, I saw a faint red tint. The rising of the moon!

Where in God's name was Gordon? Even as I stood undecided, a strange noise reached me. It was curiously like the droning of many bees.

Striding in the direction from which it seemed to come, I crossed the roof and leaned over the ledge. A sight nightmarish and incredible met my eyes.

Some twenty feet below the level of the roof on which I stood, there was another roof, of the same size and clearly a part of the same building. On one side it was bounded by the wall; on the other three sides a parapet several feet high took the place of a ledge.

A great throng of people stood, sat and squatted, close-packed on the roof—and without exception they were *negroes!* There were hundreds of them, and it was their low-voiced conversation which I had heard. But what held my gaze was that upon which their eyes were fixed.

About the center of the roof rose a sort of teocalli some ten feet high, almost exactly like those found in Mexico and on which the priests of the Aztecs sacrificed human victims. This, allowing for its infinitely smaller scale, was an exact type of those sacrificial pyramids. On the flat top of it was a curiously carved altar,

and beside it stood a lank, dusky form whom even the ghastly mask he wore could not disguise to my gaze—Santiago, the Haiti voodoo fetish man. On the altar lay John Gordon, stripped to the waist and bound hand and foot, but conscious.

I REELED back from the roof edge, rent in twain by indecision. Even the stimulus of the elixir was not equal to this. Then a sound brought me about to see Hassim struggling dizzily to his knees. I reached him with two long strides and ruthlessly smashed him down again. Then I noticed a queer sort of contrivance dangling from his girdle. I bent and examined it. It was a mask similar to that worn by Santiago. Then my mind leaped swift and sudden to a wild desperate plan, which to my dope-ridden brain seemed not at all wild or desperate. I stepped softly to the tower and, opening the door, peered inward. I saw no one who might need to be silenced, but I saw a long silken robe hanging upon a peg in the wall. The luck of the dope fiend! I snatched it and closed the door again. Hassim showed no signs of consciousness but I gave him another smash on the chin to make sure and, seizing his mask, hurried to the ledge.

A low guttural chant floated up to me, jangling, barbaric, with an undertone of maniacal blood-lust. The negroes, men and women, were swaying back and forth to the wild rhythm of their death chant. On the teocalli Santiago stood like a statue of black basalt, facing the east, dagger held high—a wild and terrible sight, naked as he was save for a wide silken girdle and that inhuman mask on his face. The moon thrust a red rim above the eastern horizon and a faint breeze stirred the great black plumes which nodded above the voodoo man's mask. The chant of the worshipers dropped to a low, sinister whisper.

I hurriedly slipped on the death mask, gathered the robe close about me and prepared for the descent. I was prepared to drop the full distance, being sure in the superb confidence of my insanity that I would land unhurt, but as I climbed over the ledge I found a steel ladder leading down. Evidently Hassim, one of the voodoo priests, intended descending this way. So down I went, and in haste, for I knew that the instant the moon's lower rim cleared the city's skyline, that motionless dagger would descend into Gordon's breast.

Gathering the robe close about me so as to conceal my white skin, I stepped down upon the roof and strode forward through rows of black worshipers who shrank aside to let me through. To the foot of the teocalli I stalked and up the stairs that ran about it, until I stood beside the death altar and marked the dark red stains upon it. Gordon lay on his back, his eyes open, his face drawn and haggard, but his gaze dauntless and unflinching.

Santiago's eyes blazed at me through the slits of his mask, but I read no suspicion in his gaze until I reached forward and took the dagger from his hand. He was too much astonished to resist, and the black throng fell suddenly silent. That he saw my hand was not that of a negro it is certain, but he was simply struck speechless with astonishment. Moving swiftly I cut Gordon's bonds and hauled him erect. Then Santiago with a shriek leaped upon me—shrieked again and, arms flung high, and pitched headlong from the teocalli with his own dagger buried to the hilt in his breast.

Then the black worshipers were on us with a screech and a roar—leaping on the steps of the teocalli like black leopards in the moonlight, knives flashing, eyes gleaming whitely.

I tore mask and robe from me and answered Gordon's exclamation with a wild laugh. I had hoped that by virtue of my disguise I might get us

both safely away but now I was content to die there at his side.

He tore a great metal ornament from the altar, and as the attackers came he wielded this. A moment we held them at bay and then they flowed over us like a black wave. This to me was Valhalla! Knives stung me and blackjacks smashed against me, but I laughed and drove my iron fists in straight, steam-hammer smashes that shattered flesh and bone. I saw Gordon's crude weapon rise and fall, and each time a man went down. Skulls shattered and blood splashed and the dark fury swept over me. Nightmare faces swirled about me and I was on my knees; up again and the faces crumpled before my blows. Through far mists I seemed to hear a hideous familiar voice raised in imperious command.

Gordon was swept away from me but from the sounds I knew that the work of death still went on. The stars reeled through fogs of blood, but hell's exaltation was on me and I reveled in the dark tide of fury until a darker, deeper tide swept over me and I knew no more.

20. *Ancient Horror*

"Here now in his triumph where all things falter,
Stretched out on the spoils that his own hand spread,
As a God self-slain on his own strange altar,
Death lies dead."

—Swinburne.

SLOWLY I drifted back into life—slowly, slowly. A mist held me and in the mist I saw a Skull——

I lay in a steel cage like a captive wolf, and the bars were too strong, I saw, even for my strength. The cage seemed to be set in a sort of niche in the wall and I was looking into a large room. This room was under the earth, for the floor was of stone flags and the walls and ceilings were composed of gigantic blocks of the same material. Shelves ranged the walls, covered with weird appliances, apparently of a scientific nature, and more were on the great table that stood in the center of the room. Beside this sat Kathulos.

The Sorcerer was clad in a snaky yellow robe, and those hideous hands and that terrible head were more pronouncedly reptilian than ever. He turned his great yellow eyes toward me, like pools of livid fire, and his parchment-thin lips moved in what probably passed for a smile.

I staggered erect and gripped the bars, cursing.

"Gordon, curse you, where is Gordon?"

Kathulos took a test-tube from the table, eyed it closely and emptied it into another.

"Ah, my friend awakes," he murmured in his voice—the voice of a living dead man.

He thrust his hands into his long sleeves and turned fully to me.

"I think in you," he said distinctly, "I have created a Frankenstein monster. I made of you a superhuman creature to serve my wishes and you broke from me. You are the bane of my might, worse than Gordon even. You have killed valuable servants and interfered with my plans. However, your evil comes to an end tonight. Your friend Gordon broke away but he is being hunted through the tunnels and can not escape.

"You," he continued with the sincere interest of the scientist, "are a most interesting subject. Your brain must be formed differently from any other man that ever lived. I will make a close study of it and add it to my laboratory. How a man, with the apparent need of the elixir in his system, has managed to go on for two days still stimulated by the last draft is more than I can understand."

My heart leaped. With all his wisdom, little Zuleika had tricked him and he evidently did not know that she had filched a flask of the life-giving stuff from him.

"The last draft you had from me," he went on, "was sufficient only for some eight hours. I repeat, it has me puzzled. Can you offer any suggestion?"

I snarled wordlessly. He sighed.

"As always the barbarian. Truly the proverb speaks: 'Jest with the wounded tiger and warm the adder in your bosom before you seek to lift the savage from his savagery.'"

He meditated awhile in silence. I watched him uneasily. There was about him a vague and curious difference—his long fingers emerging from the sleeves drummed on the chair arms and some hidden exultation strummed at the back of his voice, lending it unaccustomed vibrancy.

"And you might have been a king of the new regime," he said suddenly. "Aye, the new—new and inhumanly old!"

I shuddered as his dry cackling laugh rasped out.

He bent his head as if listening. From far off seemed to come a hum of guttural voices. His lips writhed in a smile.

"My black children," he murmured. "They tear my enemy Gordon to pieces in the tunnels. They, Mr. Costigan, are my real henchmen and it was for their edification tonight that I laid John Gordon on the sacrificial stone. I would have preferred to have made some experiments with him, based on certain scientific theories, but my children must be humored. Later under my tutelage they will outgrow their childish superstitions and throw aside their foolish customs, but now they must be led gently by the hand.

"How do you like these under-the-earth corridors, Mr. Costigan?" he switched suddenly. "You thought of them—what? No doubt that the white savages of your Middle Ages built them? Faugh! These tunnels are older than your world! They were brought into being by mighty kings, too many eons ago for your mind to grasp, when an imperial city towered where now this crude village of London stands. All trace of that metropolis has crumbled to dust and vanished, but these corridors were built by more than human skill—ha ha! Of all the teeming thousands who move daily above them, none knows of their existence save my servants—and not all of them. Zuleika, for instance, does not know of them, for of late I have begun to doubt her loyalty and shall doubtless soon make of her an example."

At that I hurled myself blindly against the side of the cage, a red wave of hate and fury tossing me in its grip. I seized the bars and strained until the veins stood out on my forehead and the muscles bulged and crackled in my arms and shoulders. And the bars bent before my onslaught—a little but no more, and finally the power flowed from my limbs and I sank down trembling and weakened. Kathulos watched me imperturbably.

"The bars hold," he announced with something almost like relief in his tone. "Frankly, I prefer to be on the opposite side of them. You are a human ape if there was ever one."

He laughed suddenly and wildly.

"But why do you seek to oppose me?" he shrieked unexpectedly. "Why defy me, who am Kathulos, the Sorcerer, great even in the days of the old empire? Today, invincible! A magician, a scientist, among ignorant savages! Ha ha!"

I shuddered, and sudden blinding light broke in on me. Kathulos himself was an addict, and was fired by the stuff of his choice! What hellish concoction was strong enough, terrible enough to thrill the Master and inflame him, I do not know, nor do I wish to know. Of all the uncanny knowledge that was his, I, knowing the man as I did, count this the most weird and grisly.

"You, you paltry fool!" he was ranting, his face lit supernaturally.

"Know you who I am? Kathulos of Egypt! Bah! They knew me in the old days! I reigned in the dim misty sea lands ages and ages before the sea rose and engulfed the land. I died, not as men die; the magic draft of life everlasting was ours! I drank deep and slept. Long I slept in my lacquered case! My flesh withered and grew hard; my blood dried in my veins. I became as one dead. But still within me burned the spirit of life, sleeping but anticipating the awakening. The great cities crumbled to dust. The sea drank the land. The tall shrines and the lofty spires sank beneath the green waves. All this I knew as I slept, as a man knows in dreams. Kathulos of Egypt? Faugh! *Kathulos of Atlantis!*"

I uttered a sudden involuntary cry. This was too grisly for sanity.

"Aye, the magician, the Sorcerer.

"And down the long years of savagery, through which the barbaric races struggled to rise without their masters, the legend came of the day of empire, when one of the Old Race would rise up from the sea. Aye, and lead to victory the black people who were our slaves in the old days.

"These brown and yellow people, what care I for them? The blacks were the slaves of my race, and I am their god today. They will obey me. The yellow and the brown peoples are fools—I make them my tools and the day will come when my black warriors will turn on them and slay at my word. And you, you white barbarians, whose ape-ancestors forever defied my race and me, your doom is at hand! And when I mount my universal throne, the only whites shall be white slaves!

"The day came as prophesied, when my case, breaking free from the halls where it lay—where it had lain when Atlantis was still sovran of the world—where since her empery it had sunk into the green fathoms — when my case, I say, was smitten by the deep sea tides and moved and stirred, and thrust aside the clinging seaweed that masks temples and minarets, and came floating up past the lofty sapphire and golden spires, up through the green waters, to float upon the lazy waves of the sea.

"Then came a white fool carrying out the destiny of which he was not aware. The men on his ship, true believers, knew that the time had come. And I—the air entered my nostrils and I awoke from the long, long sleep. I stirred and moved and lived. And rising in the night, I slew the fool that had lifted me from the ocean, and my servants made obeisance to me and took me into Africa, where I abode awhile and learned new languages and new ways of a new world and became strong.

"The wisdom of your dreary world—ha ha! I who delved deeper in the mysteries of the old than any man dared go! All that men know today, I know, and the knowledge beside that which I have brought down the centuries is as a grain of sand beside a mountain! You should know something of that knowledge! By it I lifted you from one hell to plunge you into a greater! You fool, here at my hand is that which would lift you from this! Aye, would strike from you the chains whereby I have bound you!"

HE SNATCHED up a golden vial and shook it before my gaze. I eyed it as men dying in the desert must eye the distant mirages. Kathulos fingered it meditatively. His unnatural excitement seemed to have passed suddenly, and when he spoke again it was in the passionless, measured tones of the scientist.

"That would indeed be an experiment worth while—to free you of the elixir habit and see if your dope-riddled body would sustain life. Nine times out of ten the victim, with the need and stimulus removed, would die—but you are such a giant of a brute——"

He sighed and set the vial down.

"The dreamer opposes the man of destiny. My time is not my own or I should choose to spend my life pent in my laboratories, carrying out my experiments. But now, as in the days of the old empire when kings sought my counsel, I must work and labor for the good of the race at large. Aye, I must toil and sow the seed of glory against the full coming of the imperial days when the seas give up all their living dead."

I shuddered. Kathulos laughed wildly again. His fingers began to drum his chair arms and his face gleamed with the unnatural light once more. The red visions had begun to seethe in his skull again.

"Under the green seas they lie, the ancient masters, in their lacquered cases, dead as men reckon death, but only sleeping. Sleeping through the long ages as hours, awaiting the day of awakening! The old masters, the wise men, who foresaw the day when the sea should gulp the land, and who made ready. Made ready that they might rise again in the barbaric days to come. As did I. Sleeping they lie, ancient kings and grim wizards, who died as men die, before Atlantis sank. Who, sleeping, sank with her but who shall arise again!

"Mine the glory! I rose first. And I sought out the site of old cities, on shores that did not sink. Vanished, long vanished. The barbarian tide swept over them thousands of years ago as the green waters swept over their elder sister of the deeps. On some the deserts stretch bare. Over some, as here, young barbarian cities rise."

He halted suddenly. His eyes sought one of the dark openings that marked a corridor. I think his strange intuition warned him of some impending danger but I do not believe that he had any inkling of how dramatically our scene would be interrupted.

As he looked, swift footsteps sounded and a man appeared suddenly in the doorway—a man disheveled, tattered and bloody. *John Gordon!* Kathulos sprang erect with a cry, and Gordon, gasping as from superhuman exertion, brought down the revolver he held in his hand and fired point-blank. Kathulos staggered, clapping his hand to his breast, and then, groping wildly, reeled to the wall and fell against it. A doorway opened and he reeled through, but as Gordon leaped fiercely across the chamber, a blank stone surface met his gaze, which yielded not to his savage hammerings.

He whirled and ran drunkenly to the table where lay a bunch of keys the Master had dropped there.

"The vial!" I shrieked. "Take the vial!" And he thrust it into his pocket.

Back along the corridor through which he had come sounded a faint clamor growing swiftly like a wolf-pack in full cry. A few precious seconds spent with fumbling for the right key, then the cage door swung open and I sprang out. A sight for the gods we were, the two of us! Slashed, bruised and cut, our garments hanging in tatters—my wounds had ceased to bleed, but now as I moved they began again, and from the stiffness of my hands I knew that my knuckles were shattered. As for Gordon, he was fairly drenched in blood from crown to foot.

We made off down a passage in the opposite direction from the menacing noise, which I knew to be the black servants of the Master in full pursuit of us. Neither of us was in good shape for running, but we did our best. Where we were going I had no idea. My superhuman strength had deserted me and I was going now on will-power alone. We switched off into another corridor and we had not gone twenty steps until, looking back, I saw the first of the black devils round the corner.

A desperate effort increased our lead a trifle. But they had seen us,

were in full view now, and a yell of fury broke from them to be succeeded by a more sinister silence as they bent all efforts to overhauling us.

There a short distance in front of us we saw a stair loom suddenly in the gloom. If we might reach that—but we saw something else.

Against the ceiling, between us and the stairs, hung a huge thing like an iron grill, with great spikes along the bottom—a portcullis. And even as we looked, without halting in our panting strides, it began to move.

"They're lowering the portcullis!" Gordon croaked, his blood-streaked face a mask of exhaustion and will.

Now the blacks were only ten feet behind us—now the huge grate, gaining momentum, with a creak of rusty, unused mechanism, rushed downward. A final spurt, a gasping straining nightmare of effort—and Gordon, sweeping us both along in a wild burst of pure nerve-strength, hurled us under and through, and the grate crashed behind us!

A moment we lay gasping, not heeding the frenzied horde who raved and screamed on the other side of the grate. So close had that final leap been, that the great spikes in their descent had torn shreds from our clothing.

The blacks were thrusting at us with daggers through the bars, but we were out of reach and it seemed to me that I was content to lie there and die of exhaustion. But Gordon weaved unsteadily erect and hauled me with him.

"Got to get out," he croaked; "got to warn—Scotland Yard—honeycombs in heart of London—high explosives—arms—ammunition."

We blundered up the steps, and in front of us I seemed to hear a sound of metal grating against metal. The stairs ended abruptly, on a landing that terminated in a blank wall. Gordon hammered against this and the inevitable secret doorway opened. Light streamed in, through the bars of a sort of grille. Men in the uniform of London police were sawing at these with hacksaws, and even as they greeted us, an opening was made through which we crawled.

"You're hurt, sir!" One of the men took Gordon's arm.

My companion shook him off.

"There's no time to lose! Out of here, as quick as we can go!"

I saw that we were in a basement of some sort. We hastened up the steps and out into the early dawn which was turning the east scarlet. Over the tops of smaller houses I saw in the distance a great gaunt building on the roof of which, I felt instinctively, that wild drama had been enacted the night before.

"That building was leased some months ago by a mysterious Chinaman," said Gordon, following my gaze. "Office building originally—the neighborhood deteriorated and the building stood vacant for some time. The new tenant added several stories to it but left it apparently empty. Had my eye on it for some time."

This was told in Gordon's jerky swift manner as we started hurriedly along the sidewalk. I listened mechanically, like a man in a trance. My vitality was ebbing fast and I knew that I was going to crumple at any moment.

"The people living in the vicinity had been reporting strange sights and noises. The man who owned the basement we just left heard queer sounds emanating from the wall of the basement and called the police. About that time I was racing back and forth among those cursed corridors like a hunted rat and I heard the police banging on the wall. I found the secret door and opened it but found it barred by a grating. It was while I was telling the astounded policemen to procure a hacksaw that the pursuing negroes, whom I had eluded for the moment, came into sight and I was forced to shut the door and run for it again. By pure luck I found

you and by pure luck managed to find the way back to the door.

"Now we must get to Scotland Yard. If we strike swiftly, we may capture the entire band of devils. Whether I killed Kathulos or not I do not know, or if he can be killed by mortal weapons. But to the best of my knowledge all of them are now in those subterranean corridors and——"

At that moment the world shook! A brain-shattering roar seemed to break the sky with its incredible detonation; houses tottered and crashed to ruins; a mighty pillar of smoke and flame burst from the earth and on its wings great masses of debris soared skyward. A black fog of smoke and dust and falling timbers enveloped the world, a prolonged thunder seemed to rumble up from the center of the earth as of walls and ceilings falling, and amid the uproar and the screaming I sank down and knew no more.

21. The Breaking of the Chain

"And like a soul belated,
In heaven and hell unmated,
By cloud and mist abated,
Comes out of darkness morn."
—Swinburne.

THERE is little need to linger on the scenes of horror of that terrible London morning. The world is familiar with and knows most of the details attendant to the great explosion which wiped out a tenth of that great city with a resultant loss of lives and property. For such a happening some reason must needs be given; the tale of the deserted building got out, and many wild stories were circulated. Finally, to still the rumors, the report was unofficially given out that this building had been the rendezvous and secret stronghold of a gang of international anarchists, who had stored its basement full of high explosives and who had supposedly ignited these accidentally. In a way there was a good deal to this tale, as you know, but the threat that had lurked there far transcended any anarchist.

All this was told to me, for when I sank unconscious, Gordon, attributing my condition to exhaustion and a need of the hashish to the use of which he thought I was addicted, lifted me and with the aid of the stunned policemen got me to his rooms before returning to the scene of the explosion. At his rooms he found Hansen, and Zuleika handcuffed to the bed as I had left her. He released her and left her to tend to me, for all London was in a terrible turmoil and he was needed elsewhere.

When I came to myself at last, I looked up into her starry eyes and lay quiet, smiling up at her. She sank down upon my bosom, nestling my head in her arms and covering my face with her kisses.

"Steephen!" she sobbed over and over, as her tears splashed hot on my face.

I was scarcely strong enough to put my arms about her but I managed it, and we lay there for a space, in silence except for the girl's hard, racking sobs.

"Zuleika, I love you," I murmured.

"And I love you, Steephen," she sobbed. "Oh, it is so hard to part now — but I'm going with you, Steephen; I can't live without you!"

"My dear child," said John Gordon, entering the room suddenly, "Costigan's not going to die. We will let him have enough hashish to tide him along, and when he is stronger we will take him off the habit slowly."

"You don't understand, sahib; it is not hashish Steephen must have. It is something which only the Master knew, and now that he is dead or is fled, Steephen can not get it and must die."

Gordon shot a quick, uncertain glance at me. His fine face was drawn and haggard, his clothes sooty and

torn from his work among the debris of the explosion.

"She's right, Gordon," I said languidly, "I'm dying. Kathulos killed the hashish-craving with a concoction he called the elixir. I've been keeping myself alive on some of the stuff that Zuleika stole from him and gave me, but I drank it all last night."

I was aware of no craving of any kind, no physical or mental discomfort even. All my mechanism was slowing down fast; I had passed the stage where the need of the elixir would tear and rend me. I felt only a great lassitude and a desire to sleep. And I knew that the moment I closed my eyes, I would die.

"A strange dope, that elixir," I said with growing languor. "It burns and freezes and then at last the craving kills easily and without torment."

"Costigan, curse it," said Gordon desperately, "you can't go like this! That vial I took from the Egyptian's table—what is in it?"

"The Master swore it would free me of my curse and probably kill me also," I muttered. "I'd forgotten about it. Let me have it; it can no more than kill me and I'm dying now."

"Yes, quick, let me have it!" exclaimed Zuleika fiercely, springing to Gordon's side, her hands passionately outstretched. She returned with the vial which he had taken from his pocket, and knelt beside me, holding it to my lips, while she murmured to me gently and soothingly in her own language.

I drank, draining the vial, but feeling little interest in the whole matter. My outlook was purely impersonal, at such a low ebb was my life, and I can not even remember how the stuff tasted. I only remember feeling a curious sluggish fire burn faintly along my veins, and the last thing I saw was Zuleika crouching over me, her great eyes fixed with a burning intensity on me. Her tense little hand rested inside her blouse, and remembering her vow to take her own life if I died I tried to lift a hand and disarm her, tried to tell Gordon to take away the dagger she had hidden in her garments. But speech and action failed me and I drifted away into a curious sea of unconsciousness.

Of that period I remember nothing. No sensation fired my sleeping brain to such an extent as to bridge the gulf over which I drifted. They say I lay like a dead man for hours, scarcely breathing, while Zuleika hovered over me, never leaving my side an instant, and fighting like a tigress when anyone tried to coax her away to rest. Her chain was broken.

AS I HAD carried the vision of her into that dim land of nothingness, so her dear eyes were the first thing which greeted my returning consciousness. I was aware of a greater weakness than I thought possible for a man to feel, as if I had been an invalid for months, but the life in me, faint though it was, was sound and normal, caused by no artificial stimulation. I smiled up at my girl and murmured weakly:

"Throw away your dagger, little Zuleika; I'm going to live."

She screamed and fell on her knees beside me, weeping and laughing at the same time. Women are strange beings, of mixed and powerful emotions, truly.

Gordon entered and grasped the hand which I could not lift from the bed.

"You're a case for an ordinary human physician now, Costigan," he said. "Even a layman like myself can tell that. For the first time since I've known you, the look in your eyes is entirely sane. You look like a man who has had a complete nervous breakdown, and needs about a year of rest and quiet. Great heavens, man, you've been through enough, outside your dope experience, to last you a lifetime."

"Tell me first," said I: "Was Kathulos killed in the explosion?"

"I don't know," answered Gordon somberly. "Apparently the entire system of subterranean passages was destroyed. I know my last bullet—the last bullet that was in the revolver which I wrested from one of my attackers—found its mark in the Master's body, but whether he died from the wound, or whether a bullet can hurt him, I do not know. And whether in his death agonies he ignited the tons and tons of high explosives which were stored in the corridors, or whether the negroes did it unintentionally, we shall never know.

"My God, Costigan, did you ever see such a honeycomb? And we know not how many miles in either direction the passages reached. Even now Scotland Yard men are combing the subways and basements of the town for secret openings. All known openings, such as the one through which we came and the one in Soho 48, were blocked by falling walls. The office building was simply blown to atoms."

"What about the men who raided Soho 48?"

"The door in the library wall had been closed. They found the Chinaman you killed, but searched the house without avail. Lucky for them, too, else they had doubtless been in the tunnels when the explosion came, and perished with the hundreds of negroes who must have died then."

"Every negro in London must have been there."

"I dare say. Most of them are voodoo worshipers at heart and the power the Master wielded was incredible. They died, but what of him? Was he blown to atoms by the stuff which he had secretly stored, or crushed when the stone walls crumbled and the ceilings came thundering down?"

"There is no way to search among those subterranean ruins, I suppose?"

"None whatever. When the walls caved in, the tons of earth upheld by the ceilings also came crashing down, filling the corridors with dirt and broken stone, blocking them forever. And on the surface of the earth, the houses which the vibration shook down were heaped high in utter ruins. What happened in those terrible corridors must remain forever a mystery."

MY TALE draws to a close. The months that followed passed uneventfully, except for the growing happiness which to me was paradise, but which would bore you were I to relate it. But one day Gordon and I again discussed the mysterious happenings that had had their being under the grim hand of the Master.

"Since that day," said Gordon, "the world has been quiet. Africa has subsided and the East seems to have returned to her ancient sleep. There can be but one answer—living or dead, Kathulos was destroyed that morning when his world crashed about him."

"Gordon," said I, "what is the answer to that greatest of all mysteries?"

My friend shrugged his shoulders.

"I have come to believe that mankind eternally hovers on the brinks of secret oceans of which it knows nothing. Races have lived and vanished before our race rose out of the slime of the primitive, and it is likely still others will live upon the earth after ours has vanished. Scientists have long upheld the theory that the Atlanteans possessed a higher civilization than our own, and on very different lines. Certainly Kathulos himself was proof that our boasted culture and knowledge were nothing beside that of whatever fearful civilization produced him.

"His dealings with you alone have puzzled all the scientific world, for none of them has been able to explain how he could remove the hashish craving, stimulate you with a drug so infinitely more powerful, and then pro-

duce another drug which entirely effaced the effects of the other."

"I have him to thank for two things," I said slowly; "the regaining of my lost manhood—and Zuleika. Kathulos, then, is dead, as far as any mortal thing can die. But what of those others—those 'ancient masters' who still sleep in the sea?"

Gordon shuddered.

"As I said, perhaps mankind loiters on the brink of unthinkable chasms of horror. But a fleet of gunboats is even now patrolling the oceans unobtrusively, with orders to destroy instantly any strange case that may be found floating—to destroy it and its contents. And if my word has any weight with the English government and the nations of the world, the seas will be so patrolled until doomsday shall let down the curtain on the races of today."

"At night I dream of them, sometimes," I muttered, "sleeping in their lacquered cases, which drip with strange seaweed, far down among the green surges — where unholy spires and strange towers rise in the dark ocean."

"We have been face to face with an ancient horror," said Gordon somberly, "with a fear too dark and mysterious for the human brain to cope with. Fortune has been with us; she may not again favor the sons of men. It is best that we be ever on our guard. The universe was not made for humanity alone; life takes strange phases and it is the first instinct of nature for the different species to destroy each other. No doubt we seemed as horrible to the Master as he did to us. We have scarcely tapped the chest of secrets which nature has stored, and I shudder to thing of what that chest may hold for the human race."

"That's true," said I, inwardly rejoicing at the vigor which was beginning to course through my wasted veins, "but men will meet obstacles as they come, as men have always risen to meet them. Now, I am beginning to know the full worth of life and love, and not all the devils from all the abysses can hold me."

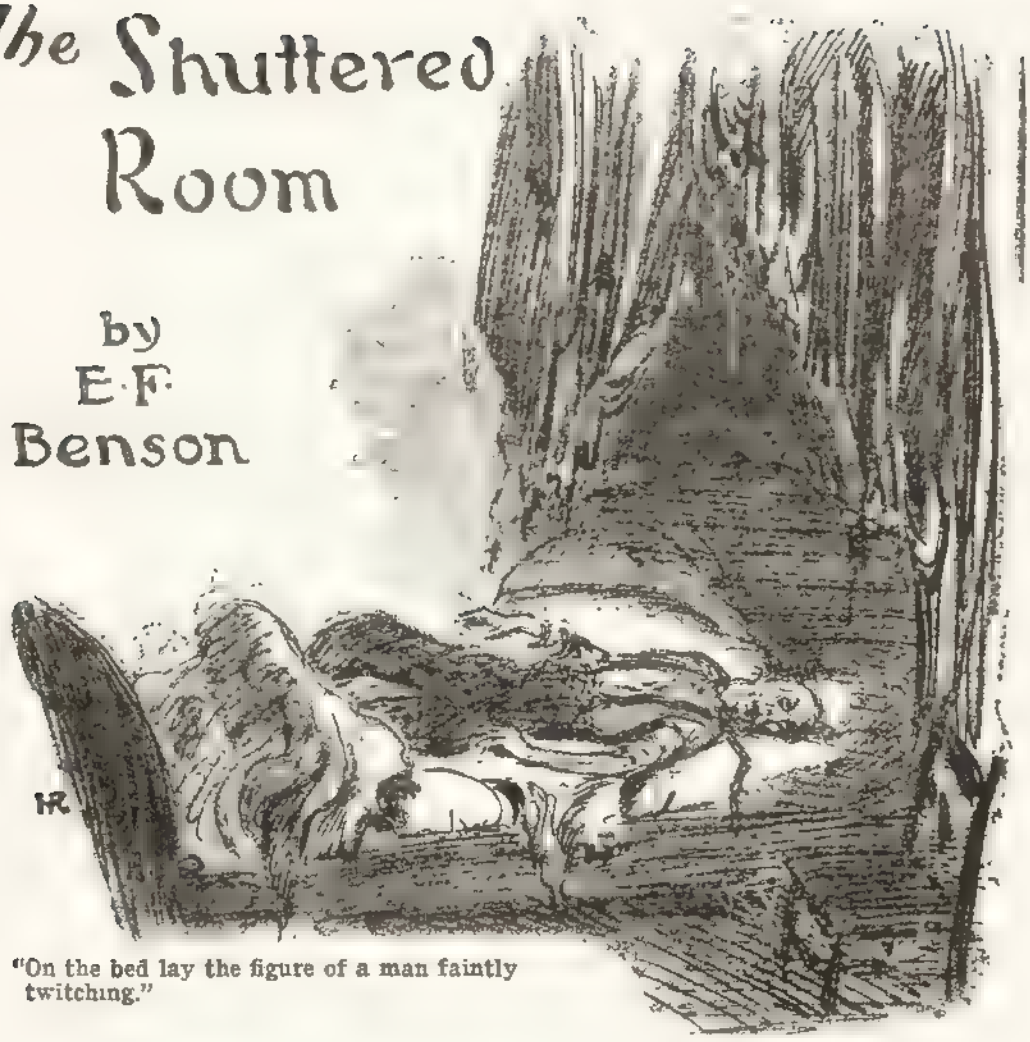
Gordon smiled.

"You have it coming to you, old comrade. The best thing is to forget all that dark interlude, for in that course lies light and happiness."

[THE END]

The Shuttered Room

by E. F. Benson



"On the bed lay the figure of a man faintly twitching."

HUGH LISTER and his wife had come down from London to attend the funeral of his uncle, that strange old hermit of a man who had lived for the last year utterly recluse and indeed practically unseen in the charming Georgian house and high-walled garden, which, at his death, had now come into possession of his nephew. Two bachelor brothers, so Hugh remembered, had originally bought the place, and for some years had lived together there. But he knew almost nothing of their history, though he could recollect seeing them both, as a boy, when they spent the night at his mother's house in town on their way abroad for some piece of holiday-travel in which they annually indulged: grim, odd-looking, men, much alike, who quarreled about the price of their tickets, and seemed considerably to dislike each other. They lived together, it appeared, because a joint establishment was cheaper than two separate houses, and they had a strong community of tastes in their love of money, and their dislike of other people. . . .

Hugh's fugitive recollection had now, after the funeral, been reinforced and amplified by a talk with Mr. Hodgkin, his uncle's solicitor, and he had learned more of these queer

brothers. They had lived entirely withdrawn from the local life of this little town of Trenthorpe: no guest ever crossed their threshold, nor did they set foot at all in the houses of their neighbors. Seldom were they ever seen outside their house and garden, and, indeed, not often within, for their domestic requirements were provided by a woman who went in for a few hours every morning to make their beds and lay their breakfasts, and cook some food for their dinner, but she would be busy in the kitchen when they came downstairs, and sometimes for days together she never set eyes on either of them. Except for her, the only human being who for the last four or five years had had access to any portion of the premises was the man who had charge of the furnace in the back yard behind the house which heated the radiators through its rooms and passages. Every day throughout the year he must come in the morning and consult the thermometer which hung in a shaded nook on a wall there, and should it register below 60° Fahrenheit, the furnace must be lit, and stoked twice during the day, before he paid his final visit at ten o'clock at night, and made up a fire that would keep the house warm till morning again.

No window ever appeared to be opened in that hermitage, and seldom cleaned; the meals were of the most frugal; an overheated house and complete solitude were all that the brothers asked of life. The man and the woman who looked after their needs went for their wages every week to Mr. Hodgkin, who also discharged for the brothers their bills and paid for them the rates and taxes of the freehold house. But this dismal frugality and joylessness was not the consequence of insufficient means, for they each had an income of five or six hundred a year, of which they spent not half. The rest merely accumulated at the bank, for they made no investments. One or other of them was occasionally seen in the early morning walking by the bank of the tidal river that swept under the hill on which Trenthorpe stood, and debouched into the sea a mile or two away, but he would have returned to the house before nine in the morning, and thereafter appeared no more.

Most of this was news to Hugh and Violet: then Mr. Hodgkin went on to speak of an event which they knew had occurred, though the details had not reached them.

"That was the manner of life of your two uncles, Mr. Lister," he said, "until a year ago when the mysterious disappearance of the younger, Mr. Henry, took place. I had just come downstairs one morning, and was beginning my breakfast when Mr. Robert, whose funeral we have just attended, was announced. He had found the front door of his house, which, as you will presently see when we visit it, is secured by a multitude of bolts and locks and chains, standing wide open. It had not been forced from outside, for the bolts had been withdrawn from within. He called to his brother, but got no answer, and ascending to his room, found that it was empty. His bed had been slept in, his instruments of toilet had been used, but there was no trace of him anywhere either in the house or the garden. It seemed most likely, therefore, that it was he who had gone out, leaving the door wide, but this was so extraordinary a thing for him to have done that Mr. Robert instantly came round to tell me about it. It struck me also as so odd that I rang up the police office, search and enquiries were made, and within an hour a cloth cap, which Mr. Robert identified as belonging to his brother, was found on the bank of the river, where sometimes he walked, and next day his walking-stick was found at low tide on a sand-shoal a mile farther down. The tide—it was one of the big spring-tides—had been at the flood

about five o'clock in the morning on which he disappeared, and assuming that he left the house soon after that, it must have been running very strong to the sea, and the river was dragged without result. Then came further evidence, for a laborer in the town who had gone out to work at daybreak, said that he had seen a man, answering to the description which was circulated, crossing the bridge above the bank where the cap was found."

"Was it supposed to have been an accident?" asked Hugh.

"There was not sufficient evidence to make that clear. It is possible that Mr. Henry might have slipped while walking along the bank, for the ground was very miry: on the other hand, Mr. Robert, in the statement he made to the police, said that for several days his brother had been very queer in his behavior, and possibly it was suicide, but there could, of course, be no inquest, since the body was never found. Death was presumed after the due legal period, and by the will which both your uncles had made, which was in my keeping, and by which the survivor of the two was named as the heir of the deceased, Mr. Henry's property passed to his brother. That was completed only a few days ago. Previously to that, Mr. Robert, as you know, had made a further will under which you inherit."

Mr. Hodgkin paused a moment, but Hugh had no question to put to him, and he continued in the same even voice.

"After Mr. Henry's disappearance," he said, "your surviving uncle became more recluse than ever, and once only, as far as I am aware, he left his house and garden, and that was when he came to see me to make his will. The charwoman continued to go in every morning, but now she hardly ever saw him. He moved from the bedroom upstairs next to Mr. Henry's, both of which looked out on to the garden, and occupied a small room on the ground floor looking out on to the street, and the two bedrooms upstairs were locked and the keys were in his keeping. He similarly locked the two corresponding rooms on the ground floor which look on to the garden, though he used them himself, and the charwoman left his food on a small table in the hall outside, and he took it in after she had gone, putting the plates and utensils he had used in the same place for her to wash up next day. Her range, in fact, was entirely confined to the kitchen and your uncle's bedroom, from which he had always gone into one of the locked rooms on the ground floor before she arrived. If he wanted anything ordered for him, there would be a note for her on the table by his bed stating his requirements. So it went on till last Thursday, the day of his death."

Again the lawyer paused.

"It is a painful and terrible account I have to give you, Mr. Lister," he said. "She went to his bedroom as usual, and found him crouching in a corner of the room, and he screamed out with fright, she said, when he saw her, and kept crying out: 'No, no! have mercy on me, Henry!' Like a sensible woman she ran straight for the doctor, and as she went past his window, she heard him still screaming. Dr. Soleham was in, and came at once: your uncle was still in some wild access of terror, and he slipped by them, and ran out into the street. Then quite suddenly he spun round and collapsed. They brought him back into the house, and in a few minutes it was all over."

Such was the grim manner in which Hugh Lister entered into his inheritance: it was all horrible and mysterious enough, but no question of personal grief or loss came into it, since he was practically a stranger to these queer relations of his. Mr. Hodgkin went into other business matters with him; there was a con-

siderable sum of money which was his, also this house and garden, of which the house, so the lawyer told him, was in a state of the most hideous dilapidation and disrepair. Of the garden he knew nothing, for though it stood in the middle of the little town, its high brick walls screened it from all scrutiny of the houses round, and the rooms which looked on to it from the house had long been kept locked. Hugh and his wife slept that night at an inn, and next morning Mr. Hodgkin called to take them over the property.

Pitiable indeed was the neglect into which this charming and dignified little mansion had fallen. The roof leaked in a dozen places, the mildewed paper was peeling off the walls, the carpets were rotted by damp and drip: here they were faded by the sun, here they were mere rags and ribands. The casement bars of the windows were perished, the panes so crusted with dust and spiders' webs that scarce a glimpse of the street outside could be seen; doors sagged on their hinges; a litter of sticks and straws from the nests of starlings that had built in the chimneys littered the hearths; pictures had fallen from the walls and lay in fragments of splintered glass and broken frames on the floor. Then there were the four locked rooms which looked on to the garden, two upstairs and two below, to be explored. A bunch of keys was found in the bedroom below, which Robert Lister had used, and they began their investigations upstairs, starting with the first door on the landing: this was the room, the charwoman told them, which Mr. Henry had occupied, and which had been locked ever since his disappearance.

The key grated rustily in the boards, but soon the door stood open, and they saw that the room was quite dark, for the windows were shuttered. A little fumbling revealed the fastenings, and Hugh, throwing them open, gave an exclamation of surprize. For the room, though long closed and neglected, with sagging ceiling and damp-stained walls, bore all signs of use: the bed-clothes, coverlet and blankets and moldy sheets were still on the bed, half-turned back, as if its occupant had only just left it. On the washstand were sponge and tooth-brush, and beside it on the floor stood a brass hot-water can, green with verdigris: in the window was a dressing-table with a looking-glass, blurred and foggy, and by it a pair of hair-brushes and a shaving-brush, and a rusty razor with the dried stain of soap on the blade. There were a couple of pairs of boots, efflorescent with gray mildew below it; the chest of drawers was full of clothes. Nothing had been touched since the morning when Henry Lister left it, not to return.

Violet felt a sudden qualm of misgiving, coming from she knew not what secret cell in her brain. The room, with its dead air and vanished occupant, was still horribly alive. She moved across to the window, with the notion of throwing it open, so that the wholesome morning breeze could enter. The windows from having been shuttered were less opaquely coated with dust than those below, and she saw what lay outside.

"Hugh, look at the garden," she called. "It's a perfect jungle: paths, lawn, flower-beds all covered with the wild."

He peered out.

"There's a job in front of us then," he said. "But we'll take that after we've been through the house. It's a queer room, this, Vi."

The chamber next door was as queer: this was the bedroom, said the charwoman, which Mr. Robert had occupied when the two brothers were living together in the house. At Mr. Henry's disappearance he had moved on to the ground floor into the room which he used until the day of his death. This upper room had been locked up since then: she had not seen it since the day when Mr. Robert had

slept downstairs. His bed had been moved down, his wardrobe and his washing-stand: a couple of crazy chairs alone now stood there, and as in the room next door, the shutters were closed when they entered. Mr. Robert, she told them, had forbidden her to go upstairs any more when Mr. Henry left them. Three more bedrooms, all absolutely empty of furniture, and a bathroom with brown stains down the side of the bath below the taps, completed this floor: the bedrooms had never been furnished at all, as far as she knew, and yet, for all the emptiness of this story of the house, it seemed to Violet as if something followed them as they went downstairs again.

There remained for exploration the two rooms on the ground-floor which looked out on to the garden, and which for the last year had always been kept locked: these were scarcely more fit for human habitation than the rest. The dust lay thick everywhere, the carpet was in rags, the windows bleared with dirt. One must have been Robert Lister's dining-room, for there were pieces of crockery and cutlery on the table, a glass, and a half-empty bottle of whisky, a jug of water and a salt-cellar, and a few tattered books were scattered on the floor beside it. One window looked out on to the street, and on the wall at right angles to that a glass-paned door led out into the garden. This was bolted at top and bottom; evidently it had long been in disuse for entrance and egress, and it was with difficulty that Hugh managed to push the bolts back into their rusty grooves. When that was done, he wrenched the door open, and it was good to let a breath of the sweet untainted air of outside penetrate into that sick and deadened atmosphere.

"My uncle never went out into the town, you tell me," he said to Mr. Hodgkin, "and we can see that he never went into the garden. He must have lived indoors altogether, and indoors he never set foot upstairs. Good God! it's ghastly: just these three rooms with no presence there except his own. Enough to drive a man mad. And yet he chose to do it. . . . What's that?"

He turned round as he spoke, wheeling quickly, and went out into the hall outside. But there was nothing there; a stair perhaps had creaked, or perhaps it was the yellow-underwing moth that flapped against the pane that made him think that there was something astir.

THE garden into which they now stepped was, as Violet had said, a mere jungle of wild and riotous growth, but it was easy to see how delectable a plot it must have been, and to feel what overgrown charms still lingered there. It was spacious for an enclosed space like this, with streets and houses all round it, a liberal acre in extent, and defended by its high brick walls from any intrusive eye. From no quarter could it be overlooked, so tall was its mellowed fencing, and only the peaks of house-roofs and their chimneys and the vane on the church-tower peered above the copings. A broad strip of flower-bed had once sunned itself along the house-front, bordered by box-hedging; a paved walk led by it, and beyond had been a stretch of lawn up to the farther wall. To the left the plot had once been divided by a trellis that now leaned tipsily askew this way and that, with great gaps in it, through which could be seen fruit-trees, now in flower, on this spring afternoon: there no doubt had been the kitchen-garden. But now rank weeds and grasses had triumphed over everything on lawn and border; the paved walk was plumed with them and thickly overlaid with mosses; creepers that must once have been trained up the walls sprawled fallen across the ground-growths, and tendrils of degenerated rose-trees thread-

ed their thorns through the shrubby clumps of the box-edgings.

The two men pushed across the lawn through briers and thick grasses and entanglements, but Violet said she had had enough and sat down to wait for them on a stone bench, crumbled and mossy, which stood on the edge of the paved walk. The charm of the place struggled with the melancholy disorder of it, and she could imagine it cultivated and cared for, with its beds glowing again with ordered jewels, its lawn smooth-napped, its paved walks free of the tangle of growth, but there was something more than this tangle of weeds that had to be cleared away before peace could return to it. Something beyond mere neglect was amiss with it; something dead but horribly alive was watching her even as in the shuttered room at the head of the stairs. . . .

The stone seat faced the sun, and a little dazzled by its brightness, though delighting in the genial warmth of it after the airless seclusion of the house, Violet closed her eyes, wondering what it could be that wrought this strange perturbation within her. Hugh and Mr. Hodgkin had vanished now behind the crazy trellis; their voices no longer came to her, and she felt extraordinarily sundered from the touch of human intercourse. And yet she was not alone: there was some presence, not theirs, moving up closer to her and watching her. Once she opened her eyes to reassure herself that it was only her imagination thus playing tricks with her, but of course there was nothing there, and again she closed them. An odd drowsiness invaded her, and she saw a shadow come across the red field of her closed eyelids. She thought to herself that the two men were approaching her, and that it was they who had come between her and the sun, and she waited for the sound of their voices or their steps. Perhaps Hugh thought she was asleep, and meant to give her forty winks or so: if that was in his mind, she wished he would stand aside, for with him cutting off the sunlight from her, the air had become very cold. She gave a little shiver, and opened her eyes. There was no one there.

It was startling: she had felt quite sure there had been someone standing close in front of her, but it certainly was not Hugh, nor indeed was there any sign of a living presence. But there he was, stepping over the fallen trellis, and coming quickly toward her.

"Violet, dear," he said, "isn't the place utterly enchanting? I'm going to have all the rags and rubbish turned out of the house at once, and get it washed and cleaned and renewed. I shall furnish it, too, and put a caretaker in, and then we'll bring the garden into order again. Then when it's all habitable we can settle what we shall do with it, let it, or sell it, or keep it. What extraordinary odd fellows they must have been, living in squalor and discomfort and letting everything go to ruin! But I shall restore it all with the money they saved over it. And frankly, I've fallen in love with the place: I want to keep it terribly."

HUGH set to work with his usual volcanic energy to put the place in order again: he and Violet took rooms at the inn near, and spent hot and laborious days in turning out the dirty raffle that filled the house, reserving for later examination any papers that might possibly be of interest. All the upholstery was perished; carpets, curtains and rugs were only fit for the fire: there were cupboards, and presses full of threadbare stuffs, moth-eaten blankets and moldy linen, and a clean sweep had to be made of all these before the cleaning and redecoration of the house could begin. Day after day a bonfire in the kitchen-garden smoldered and burst into flames and smoldered again, for little even of the solider furniture was

serviceable: rickety tables and broken-seated chairs seemed to have been sufficient for the uncles. After that the walls must be stripped of their torn and flapping papers, and scraped of their discolored paint, the roof must be repaired, ceilings and fittings of doors and windows renovated. To Violet all this holocaust of moldy raffles signified something more than the mere material cleaning-up, even as the opening of windows long-closed and the admission into the house of the air and the sun and the wholesome winds did more than refresh the staleness of its actual atmosphere: both were symbolical outward signs of some interior purging. And yet, even when all was clean and empty, ready for its new furnishing, the very essence of what they had been turning out still lingered. All was not well with the house: in some strange manner the shadow that had come between her closed eyes and the sun as she sat on the garden-bench had entered, and was establishing itself more firmly day by day.

She knew how fantastic such a notion was, and so, though it persisted, she could not bring herself to speak to Hugh about it. It haunted the rooms and the passages, and though she got no direct vision of its presence it was there, like some shy creature wary in hiding itself, but yet wishing to make itself manifest: sometimes it seemed malignant, sometimes sad and pitiful. Most of all it was perceptible in that pleasant square room at the top of the stairs which they had found shuttered, where the bedclothes were turned back as if he who had slept there had just quitted it, and where the apparatus of a man's toilet still lay on the dressing-table: the room, so the charwoman had told them, occupied by Henry Lister. Had this presence something to do with him, she wondered? She felt it also in the room downstairs occupied after his disappearance by Robert: there she felt it as something fierce or revengeful. Finally she began to wonder whether Hugh was conscious that there was something queer in that room at the head of the stairs, for at first he had intended to make his private den there, but he had abandoned that, and though the furnishing of the house was proceeding apace he had left it empty.

IT WAS early in May that the house was ready to be occupied in a tentative picnicking fashion: vans had been unloading all day, a couple of servants had come down, and tonight Hugh and Violet were to sleep here, for to be on the premises, said Hugh, was the surest way of speeding such tasks as picture-hanging and carpet-laying. The dusk of the evening was warm, and he and Violet were sitting on the stone bench in the garden with a box of papers between them which must be looked through before they could be consigned to the bonfire. The garden was rapidly being tamed, the lawn had been scythed in preparation for the mowing-machine, the paved walk had been cleared of moss, and weeding was going on in the beds.

"But the soil is wretched and sour," said Hugh, as he untied a bundle of papers. "That bed by the house must be dug over deep and a cartload of rich stuff put in before it's fit for planting. Hullo, a photograph . . . Why, it's of the two uncles, and was taken here in the garden. They're sitting on the stone bench where we are now. Before they became hermits, I suppose."

Violet looked over his shoulder.

"Which is Uncle Robert?" she said.

"That one on the left, the older of the two, the bald one."

"And the other the one who disappeared?" asked Violet.

"Yes."

He looked up quickly as he spoke, and Violet, following his eye, thought she saw for a moment in the dusk some figure standing on the paved

walk twenty yards away. But it resolved itself into a pale stain on the wall and a bush immediately below, and she took another glance at the faded photograph. There was a strong family resemblance between them; she would have guessed that the two faces, rather long-nosed, with eyes very wide apart, were those of brothers, but they were quite distinguishable.

Presently Hugh came to the end of the packet, and he took the bulk of it to toss on to the smoldering bonfire. The evening was now beginning to get chilly, and when he had gone she rose and took a turn down the paved walk. The light from the west glowed dusky-red on the brick front of the house, and glancing idly up at the window of the room at the head of the stairs, she saw a man standing there within, looking down on her. The glimpse she got of his face was but brief, for almost immediately he turned away, but she had seen enough to know that it was the face of the younger of the two brothers at whose photograph she had just been looking.

For one moment sheer terror clutched at her: the next, as if by some subtle recognition her mind told her that here was the visible manifestation of the presence of which she had for days been conscious. It was he who had shadowed her closed eyelids, it was he who, as yet unseen, had haunted the house, and in especial the room at the window of which she now beheld him. Though the flesh of her still quaked at the thought that she had looked on one who had passed beyond the dread dim gate, it was terribly interesting, and she continued looking up, half dreading, half hoping that she would see him again. Then she heard Hugh's step returning from his errand.

"What's the matter, Violet?" he said. "You're white: your hands are trembling."

She pulled herself together.

"It's nothing," she said. "Something startled me just now."

Looking at him, she guessed with a sense of certainty what was in his mind when he asked her what was the matter.

"Hughie, have you seen something too that—that comes from beyond?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"No, but I know it's there," he said, "and it's chiefly in that room at the top of the stairs. That's why I've done nothing with it. Have you seen it? Was it that which startled you just now? What was it?"

She pointed to the window.

"There," she said. "A man looked out on me from the window. It was Henry Lister. His room, you know."

They were both looking up now, and even as she spoke the figure appeared there again. Once more it turned away, and vanished.

For a long moment they met each other's eyes.

"Violet, are you frightened?" he said.

"I'm not going to be," she said. "Whatever it is, whatever it's here for, it can't hurt us. I think it wants us to do something for it . . . But, Hughie, why did Robert scream out 'Have mercy?' Why did he run from the house?"

Hugh had no answer for this.

"I shall go in," he said at length, "and open the door of that room, and see what is there. I left it locked, I know. Don't come with me, Violet."

"But I wish to," she said; "I want to know all that there is to be known. What we have seen means something."

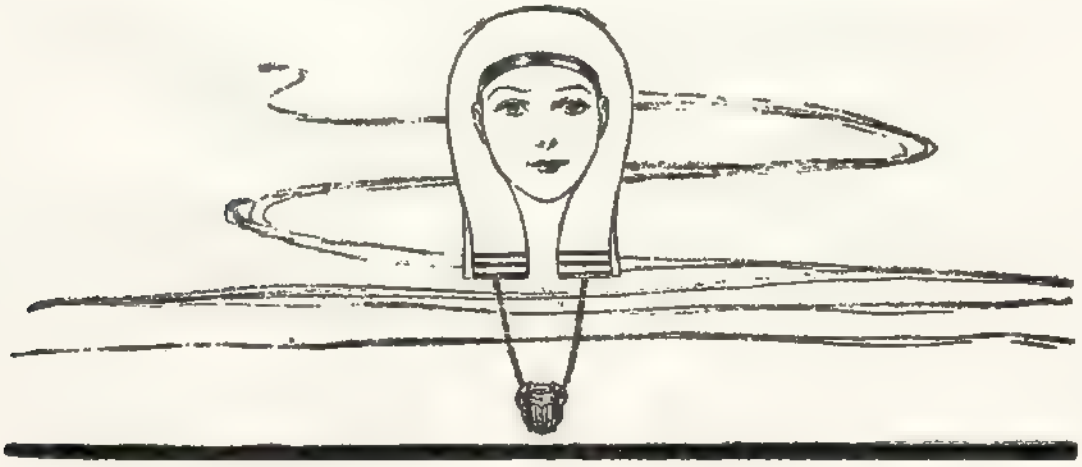
They went upstairs together, and paused for a second outside the door. The key was in the lock, and Hugh turned it and threw the door wide.

The room was lit by the fading evening light, but clearly visible. It was completely furnished as on the day when they had first looked into it. On

the bed there lay the figure of a man faintly twitching. His face was turned away, but with a final movement his head fell back on the pillows, and they saw who it was. The mouth drooped open, the cheeks and forehead were of a mottled purple in color, and round the neck was tied a cord . . . And then they saw that they were looking into a perfectly empty room, unfurnished, but newly papered and painted.

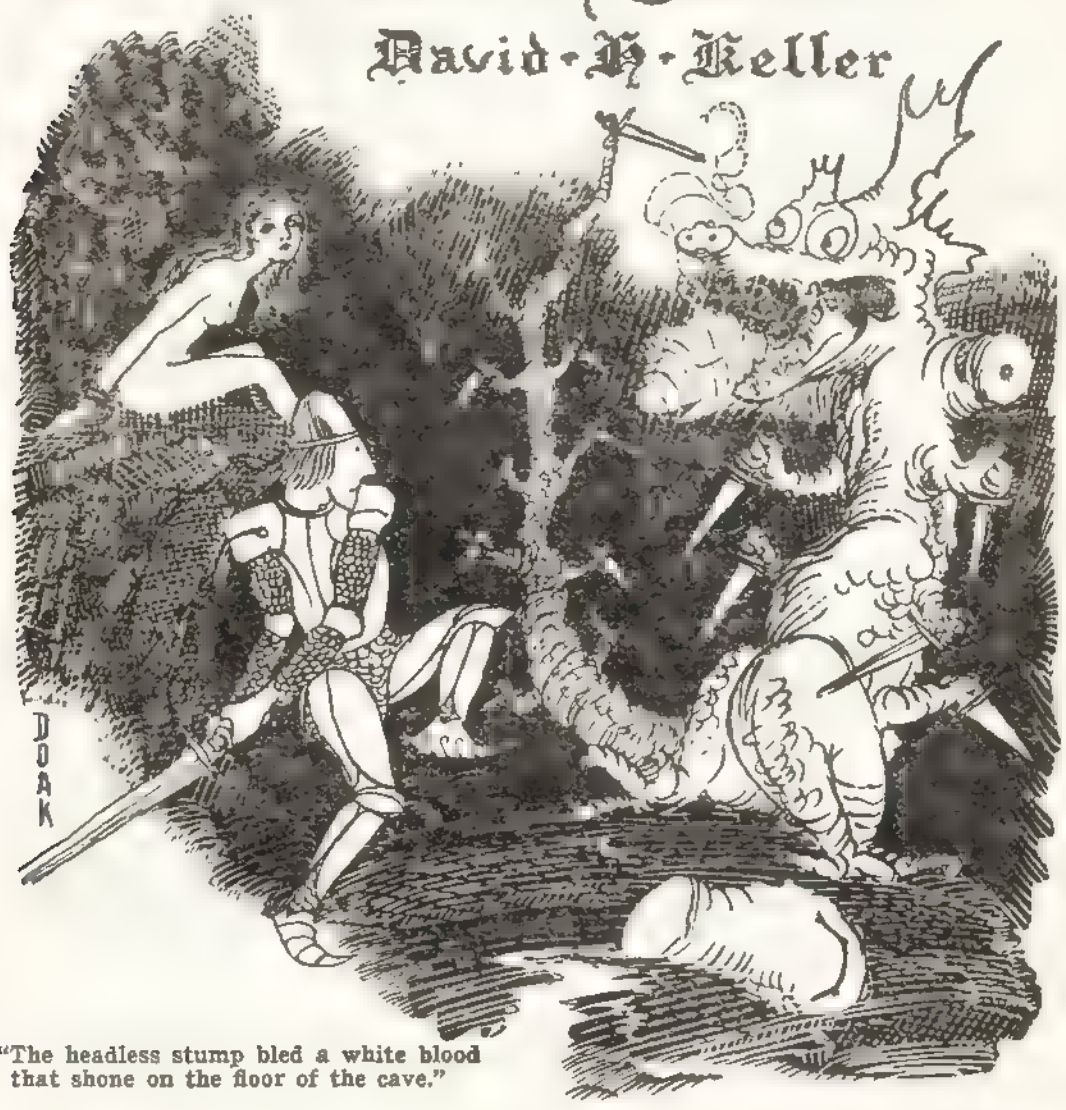
THE deep digging-over of the flower-bed along the house front began next morning, and an hour later the gardener came in to tell Hugh what he had found. The digging was resumed under the supervision of the police-inspector, and the body when disinterred was removed to the mortuary. The identity was established at the inquest; it was established also that death had been due to strangulation, for a piece of rope was still tied round the neck. Though there could be no absolute certainty as to the history of the murder, only one reconstruction of it would fit the facts which were known; namely, that Henry Lister had been strangled by his brother during the night preceding his disappearance, and buried in the garden. Very early next morning Robert Lister, who in height and general appearance strongly resembled his brother, must have gone down to the river-bank (having been seen on his way there by the laborer from the town) and left his cap on the path, and thrown the stick ino the river. He must also with a diabolical cunning have arranged his brother's room to look as if he had got up and dressed himself as usual. He then returned, and an hour or two later went to Mr. Hodgkin's house, saying that he had found the front door open, and that his brother was missing. No search was made in the house or garden, for the evidence all pointed to his having dressed and gone out and met his death in the river. Why Robert Lister in that seizure of panic which gripped him just before he died called on his brother to have mercy on him was no affair for police investigation, but it seems likely that he saw, or thought he saw, some very terrible thing, some strange specter such as was certainly seen by Hugh and Violet in the room at the top of the stairs. But that is conjecture only.

The two brothers now lie side by side in the cemetery on the hill outside Trenthorpe: it may be added that in all England there is no more wholesome or tranquil house than that which was once the scene of so tragic a history and of so grim and ghostly a manifestation.



No-Other-Man···

David·H·Keller



"The headless stump bled a white blood that shone on the floor of the cave."

"WHY come to me with your worries?" I asked the old people, rather petulantly. "Any man could find your daughter for you, and there are many good men in your own land."

I was irritated.

Ever since the time I slew the dragon of Thorp's Woods, the people of Cornwall thought that all they had to do in time of trouble was to come to me. For a while I tried to be considerate; I really thought at one time that perhaps it was part of my duties as Overlord of the land to kill serpents, destroy giants, and in every way make the country a pleasant and kindly place to live in. To live up to these high ideals gave me little leisure to devote to my special studies, and, often, I was no sooner back from one adventure and comfortably clad in my

velvets, with my nose between the pages of a book, than a fresh demand made it necessary to put on my armor again and sally out to rout a few more robbers or cut the head off another slithering snake. It was hard to be so disturbed from the reading of a good book, and in wintertime the harness and armor were so cold that only after some hours of wearing did my goose-flesh subside and enable me to ride my charger with any comfort.

Now, for some weeks, everything in Cornwall had been quiet. If there were any dragons remaining, they thought it best to hide in secret rock caves, while all the robbers had fled to Wales and Brittany, and the giants were all rotting in their gore. As far as my sway extended, all was quiet, and I felt that I had well earned a rest. It was cold, the roads were deep in mire, the sky overcast; my good steed was comfortable, knee-deep in straw and munching the best grain my peasants could raise; I had large logs in the fireplace, new cushions to sit on, a woolen shawl for my knees and another for my shoulders, old wine in the glass, a joint of meat on the table and a book in my hand; why should I worry about wrongs done in Wales or lands of the Scot or Irish?

Then, after but a few days of comfort, these old folks came. They brought with them a long parchment, bearing the scrawl and seal of the King of Wales. That did not mean much to me, for they were changing their kings every month, but it had so impressed my men that they had brought the old folks to the door of my library, and when I refused to see them and ordered them fed and put out of the castle, they raised such a lamentable cry that, from sheer necessity, I gave way to their moans and ordered them in to tell their story.

They were wet and cold; so I gave them a place by the fire. And they seemed hungry; so I ordered meat and wine brought them, and I told them, for the sake of good Saint Jerome, to fill up and dry up first and then I would listen to what they came to say to me. Thus I gained an extra half hour of time to read my book, and when I saw this much time slip down the narrow channel of the sand-glass, and found that in this space of time I had translated over four lines of Latin, I was much cheered and almost tempted to be civil to the old folks.

The story they told was a familiar one. Their daughter had been taken from them; they believed that she was being held a prisoner in one of the mountain caves a dozen miles from their hut. What manner of man or beast had done this foul deed they knew not; there were strange tales about the things that lived in that mountain. They had been to see the king of their land, and he had asked in vain, among all his knights, for one to rescue the maiden; they had all refused to undertake the adventure; then he had thought of writing to me concerning the wrong done these old folks and asking me to right it. As they became more excited, they raised their hands and swore that never was there such a lovely girl as their daughter, nor so pure a one, and why had the saints permitted this terror to come to her?

Naturally, I was sorry for them. Yet it seemed to me that I was being imposed upon and that the knights of Wales ought to attend to their own giants and dragons; so, when they finally came to the end of their tale, I gruffly said:

"Why come to me with your worries? Any man could find your daughter for you, and there are many good men in your own land."

At that they cried out that I was wrong, and the woman said over and over again, "No other man. *No other man!* NO OTHER MAN!" which was all silly nonsense, being foolish and far from the truth.

However, it all ended in my telling them to go to bed and rest and that on the morrow I would return with

them and see what could be done concerning the safety of their daughter, though I doubted if she were yet alive; so, sending them off to a good night's rest, I ordered fresh logs put on the fire and some spiced beer warmed for my comfort, and started in to read the adventures of a good knight Hercules, who was either a better fighter or a better liar than I ever could hope to become. And, finally, I also sought the warmth of a feather-bed, and, disturbed in mind, waited for what the morrow would bring.

THE next day, in a drizzle of rain, we started for some town in Wales, the proper sounding of whose name I never did learn. The old dame and her man rode slowly ahead on two sorry nags, while behind them I rode my favorite stallion.

The woolens and leathers I wore under my armor had been well warmed and greased before I started, but the day was chill and in no time at all I became depressed over the cold of the harness on my back. So I tried to pass the time reciting Latin verbs, which made the old folks shiver and cross themselves for that they thought my mutterings to be imprecations and incantations against the power of the Evil One; and now and then my stallion reared in the air and neighed, perhaps for his warm stall and his hearty meals of grain, and perhaps for other things, but I gruffly commanded him to come down to earth on all fours.

So on we drove for the space of five days. At night we slept where we could and by day we rode and suffered from the chill of the cold rain. I had some gold with me and so could pay for the best, but even the best was sorry worst, and ever and again I sighed for my velvets and my fire, good beer and Latin manuscripts. Yet an end finally came, and we arrived at the house of the old man and his wife. It was raining as we came there, and the sky was dark and lowering; yet through the gloom I could see the dark mountains far in the distance, covered with mighty trees and holding in their mysterious fastnesses this supposedly lovely daughter and the unknown monster that had torn her from her parental home.

When the news of our arrival was spread through the little town, the neighbors came, no doubt, to see the Giant-killer, and whether they were disappointed in my looks, I wot not; at least, they did not say so. However, since I had come all this long five-day journey to accomplish another wondrous feat of chivalry, I was glad to have these simple folk to talk to, for I wanted to know all that there was to be known about the land and the special monsters it harbored, and just how this young maiden had been taken, and what manner of fiend it was that had done the deed (for I found that such preliminary investigation was of the greatest value in winning a victory). Also I was glad to have some of the simple folk to carefully dry my armor and rub it with lard and oil, and also to rub over my cold muscles a special holy oil which came to me in a gold vial from the Holy Land, being part of the lard boiled from a great saint during his martyrdom, which lard was very comforting to me, both in a physical and a religious manner.

All of the men had a different tale to tell about the monster. None had actually seen it, but all agreed that it was a serpent, twenty yards long, a shape like a great unicorn, a headless man, a bull with the head of a man, a real dragon like unto those of Gobi, or a three-legged giant. All agreed that it was a mighty horrid thing, that could easily kill a man, simply by blowing a flame of fire in his face. The usual weapons were powerless: steel could not cut, lance could not pierce, mace would not crush. The more they talked, the more peculiar I felt and the more clearly I saw why the knights of Wales were too busy

to attend to this matter. It was really an awkward situation.

Yet they were all mightily cheered over my being there and said repeatedly that if any human man could kill this monster, the Giant-killer of Cornwall could, and I told them I was sure I could find the maiden and rid the land of this foul animal, be it man, beast or demon. And at that, a very old Jew bent before me and humbly thanked me and said that he would give me fifty gold crowns if I did so, as he was betrothed to this maiden, having purchased her from her father, and that the wedding would have been consummated by now had the fiend of the mountains not taken her.

I looked at the old man, his withered face and shrunken frame and scanty white hair, and the more I saw of him the less I liked him, and thought to myself that perhaps the girl was better off in the mountain than in his house. In fact, I suddenly grew sick of the whole adventure and demanded that I be taken to my room and left to sleep till the morrow. And so they did to me, and a restless time I had, missing sorely my feather-bed, as I tossed on a couch of corn shucks.

The next morning the entire people of the town gathered to see me put on my armor, and after that was done and a quart of beer drunk moodily (for it was poor stuff), I sadly mounted my horse and rode toward the mountain, the priest going ahead, singing a prayer, and the old man and woman on either side my horse, and the old Jew running on behind, urging me to be careful, and that he would surely give me my fifty crowns.

The old woman kept repeating, "No other man would do it. No other man!"

"Would be such a fool," I added in a whisper. "No other man. Why, a thousand men I had read of would have been glad to do such a deed—only, I, who had cleared my own country of such monsters, was a fool to do such dirty work for the men of Wales."

And the old man and the priest and the Jew took up her chant, "No other man would do it—no other man." Yet, finally, we came to the edge of the wood and a mile from the side of the mountain, and they paused and said they would go no further with me but would go back and wait in prayer for my safe return.

THE trees were so close together that I could not ride my charger; so I got off and tied him to a tree, and then I looked into the wood. It was dark and feyish, yet through the trees came glittering, glimmering gems of sunshine, and far away I heard a thrush sing and a squirrel chatter in the tree, and I knew then that I was in the Enchanted Forest, for here was springtime and pleasant weather. It being warm, I took a view of the situation and saw that I could not fight well with all the steel on me; so, back to my horse, and there I made myself comfortable, and when I next wended woodward I had on my woolens, and my great sword hung on my back, my shield on one arm, a dagger in my belt, and a lovely woods flower in my right hand.

Thus, on to the rocks, and nearing them I heard the sound of singing, and the song was about love and roses and ladies' tresses, and I marveled at this, and knew that it was magic, and further on I wandered, and finally came to the singer, and at that I was greatly frightened. For I knew that now I was in the midst of a great mystery and a mighty magic. For this evil beast who had stolen the poor girl from her parents had, in preparation for my arrival, changed, by his cunning, his so ugly body into that of a lovely damsel, and was waiting there to deceive me, and, when I was unaware, to kill me with his poisons and his powers.

I knew that it was useless to cut such a being with sword or pierce

him with dagger. His body was so much air. In such a conflict, weapons of ordinary use were worthless. So I carefully put off my sword and my shield and my dagger, and, holding the woods flower in my outstretched hand, I closed in to the conflict.

"Though thou art a mighty magician," I cried, "I command you to give to me the poor little girl you stole from her parents on Ash Wednesday. Give her to me and I will not harm you, but if you persist in your evil desires, I will match my magic with yours and overcome you."

"Who are you?" demanded the creature, "and why are you here?"

I could tell from the way he talked that he was impressed by my threat.

"I am the Overlord of Cornwall, Cecil, the son of James, the son of David, the son of John, and back even to Saint Christopher, who loved before he became a saint. For years I have ruled in Cornwall. You may be interested in knowing that I am the one who killed the dragon of Thorp's Woods. I destroyed seven slithering, shimmering snakes in Ireland. Alone and unaided I destroyed seven Moors who threatened the reputation of one of our ladies. On twenty-three gallows in my land hang, bound in chains, and coated with tar, twenty-three bandits whom I caught and caused to be punished for their crimes."

I paused to watch the effect of all this. There was no doubt that the miscreant was impressed. So I continued:

"So it was that when this poor girl, who, by the way, was to marry a very rich man, was stolen from her parents, these simple folk appealed to the King of Wales, and he pled with his knights to rescue her, but they all refused, being too busy. So he sent a special letter to me, and for five days I rode over the worst roads possible to effect this great deed. I think that you had better submit quietly and let me restore the girl to her parents and to her future husband, because, if you refuse, I will have to fight and overcome you, no matter what shape you may assume."

At that the monster started to cry, "She will never go back and marry that miserable old man. It would be better for her to die."

I realized at once that this was simply a part of the deception that the horrific monster was trying to impose on me with; so I grew stern.

"She must go back!" I said harshly, and twirling the woods flower in my hand to distract his attention, I advanced on him, for it was my purpose to suddenly spring forward, take him by the throat, and squeeze him to death before he had a chance to change his form from that of a lovely woman to his usual one of a dragon or six-legged scorpion.

The monster looked at me. The eyes he had assumed were blue, the face fair and smooth as a rose petal, but his mouth was a lovely red bow. The body he had taken for a disguise was fair, and, under the silken robe, swayed with the seductive curves of a Grecian Aphrodite. Suddenly he started to cry.

"No other man," he sobbed, "would make me go back and marry that old Jew. No other man——"

But by then I had jumped forward and crushed him in my arms.

SOME days later I came out of the dark forest. My poor charger had eaten all the grass within his reach, had broken loose, but, true to his master, had remained near the armor. I slowly put the heavy pieces back on, being minded to thus return to the town. Then I mounted and drew the damsel up in front of me and thus we slowly rode back to the town.

To my surprize I was met there by a great concourse of armed men. It seems that the King of Wales and his knights, hearing that I had gone into the mountains on such a grim adventure, had gathered to my rescue, and, had I not appeared that day, would

have searched for my bones to give them Christian burial. My sudden arrival made such a search unnecessary; so there was nothing to do but make merry over my return from this so great adventure, and allow the feasting and merrymaking to take the place of solemn masses for the peace of my soul.

At the banquet table I commanded that the damsel sit next to me and said that there were very necessary reasons why this should be done. Then came the feasting and the talking, the Welsh being very brave at both of such indoor sports. The King of Wales told how proud they were to have the Overlord of Cornwall take part in such a glorious adventure; the father of the girl told of his joy and thanksgiving for her safe return; the aged Jew handed me a silk bag with the fifty gold crowns in it as the reward he had offered, and then he begged the monarch that the wedding go on while all the world was there and that he would give fine presents to every one of the guests. But I rose in my place and said:

"I can not let this Jew die!"

"What do you mean?" asked the king.

"To explain," I replied, "will be a pleasure to me, though I can not do so without telling of my overcoming of this great Welsh monster in the mountain cave. If, in the telling, I seem at times to be boastful, you will pardon my pride; for, really, the deed was a great deed and well done. I do not want to tell all the details, but it will be necessary for me to do so in order to show why it is impossible for the Jew to marry her. Because he is a good Jew and I do not want him to die.

"When I came to the woods I heard a horrific hissing and knew by the sound that the monster was trying to frighten me. So, leaving my horse, I advanced carefully, and as the wood grew darker I saw the flashing of lightning and these flashes came from the eyes of the dragon. Finally, I came near enough to see the creature, and you may judge of my surprize when I tell you that it was a worm, many feet long, but, instead of feet like a millipede, it had arms and hands, and each hand grasped a weapon, sharp as a dagger and poisoned with deadly dragon's doom. There were three heads, and I might remark here that a three-headed monster is not new to me, I having killed several of them in Gorkiland, but in this case only one had a face on it; the other two being smooth of features, save a mouth that dripped blood and spittle. It had no sign of fear and rushed on me, and for over an hour I had need of all my skill defending myself from its weapons. I used, as is my wont in such cases, my two-handed sword and finally succeeded in cutting off one of the heads. It howled mournfully and ran into its cave.

"I rushed after it and was not surprized to find a large cavern well-lighted with the baleful light from the monster's eyes. Also the headless stump bled a white blood that shone on the floor of the cave.

"The fighting now was hard, because I was constantly stumbling over the bones of maidens he had previously ravished and devoured. At last I snipped off another head, and now the monster retreated into a still smaller cave. Chained to the wall of this cavern was the little girl who had been stolen from her parents and who would have been destroyed, body and soul, at the next full moon, had I not come when I was called for.

"The dragon now assumed the shape of an old magician and, breathing harshly, asked me to leave him at peace, offering to share the beauty of the maiden with me if I did so. Of course, I scorned such a dastardly offer and, calling on him to defend himself, I rushed on him with my dagger. Seeing that he was doomed, by the power of his magic he metamorphosed himself into a bubble of

air and vanished down the maiden's throat.

"I have brought her back. The monster is still within her, waiting for a chance to come forth and destroy all of you good people of Wales. If this poor maiden married the Jew, the monster would sally forth on the bridal night and tear him to pieces. If she remains here, the whole village is in danger. Only is the world safe so long as he realizes that I am close at hand to strangle him to death at his first appearance."

The audience shivered and seemed stunned by my tale.

Finally the king asked, "What are your plans? And why should you undergo such a risk to save the life af a Jew or of the simple folks of this village?"

"I propose to take the unfortunate girl with me to Cornwall. I shall watch her closely on the trip. If the monster comes from out her, I will at once kill him and return her to the parents and the Jew. If he still sulks in her midgut by the time I reach Cornwall, I shall give her rare medicines I know of and thus, gradually, the monster will die within her. I am a lone man, without wife or children, and it is better for me to take this great risk, even if I die for it, than to have all these good people die in one night of slaughter. Besides, I know a lot about devils and their manner of action, and thus it is best for me to keep the maiden near me till this fiend is thoroughly destroyed."

"Oh, kind sir," cried the mother, "how can we thank you? You are too good to us. No other man would have done all the wondrous things just for strangers; I will feel so safe with my daughter in your care."

And the Jew came up to me on his knees and humbly handed me a gold chain and thanked me for saving his life from a horrible tearing at the hands of this monster.

Now it was late in the afternoon, yet, as the day was warm, I insisted that I depart for Cornwall; so up I got me on my charger, and I put the maiden up in front of me, and in back was a bundle of presents of jewels and fine silken stuffs from the king and his knights, and I wore all my armor, save my helmet, which I had tied to my saddle and wore instead a little velvet cap.

So we said a kindly farewell to all those people.

The king rode down the road with me.

"Art sure, dear sibling," he asked, as he prepared to leave me, "art sure the damsel hath the devil in her?"

"Certainly," I replied, very seriously.

"Then she be a true woman," he answered; "for all women I have ever met are thus inhabited."

With this he winked at me, and, turning, trotted his horse back to the town where his company waited on him.

Ruth and I fared on through the summer afternoon. More and more as the sun lowered in the kindly sky, she leaned heavily against me, and now and then she sighed, as she looked up at me with those blue eyes and asked: "Dost see aught of the monster peering from my mouth?"

"Nay," I replied, holding her closer so that she need not be frightened.

"Yet I fear me that it cometh out. Drive it back, my heart!"

And so I did with kisses.

How stubborn that devil was! How hard to drive back! . . . So, the maiden was satisfied.

Finally, she gasped.

"No other man," she whispered, "would have done it as you did."

"No other man," I echoed.

And once again I drove the devil back from her mouth.

The Story of a Lethal Curse

THE INHERITORS

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

THERE is no longer any valid reason for withholding the true facts of the tragedy at Hudson Heights from the public, and I chronicle these facts now in response to the pressure of public opinion.

The matter really began with Momsen's note of the seventh, asking me down for the seventeenth, or before, if possible. Momsen was an odd chap, but always intensely interesting. Our mutual interest in archeology had brought us together some years before. From the first, Momsen had been interested in old houses. A mere interest had developed into a passion, and within the half-year preceding the note of the seventh I heard from mutual friends that he had finally acquired an old colonial mansion somewhere along the Hudson. He had named it, aptly enough, Hudson Heights.

It was at this place that Momsen met me at midday of the seventeenth. He was little changed, except that faint lines had appeared around his mouth and eyes. His hair, too, was graying at the temples.

"I thought you weren't coming, old man. I'd about given up hope." He laughed as he took my suitcase, and again when I explained that I had been detained at the office. "I might have suspected that," he said.

He disappeared into another room with my belongings. When he returned I began to question him—could it be his birthday? I daresay I amused him, for he brushed my questions aside, explaining that he had called me down because he thought me the most reliable of all his acquaintances for the thing we were to go through. This was a point gained, and I urged him on.

"You notice there's a striking lack of servants?" he asked.

I nodded. I had noticed it, and had intended asking about it. In a house like this, and with the money that Momsen made no secret of having, the absence of servants was inexcusable.

"Every year the servants take off on the seventeenth of this month. Prior to this year, even the owners of the place were out of it on that day."

"Why?" I asked in ill-concealed wonder.

He shrugged his shoulders. "On the seventeenth of February, this place is turned over to the ghost, or ghosts, whichever it is. Only on this date is the house haunted."

With this he rose, refusing to answer my questions, and promised to take the matter up in detail at dinner that evening.

DUSK was coming on when we seated ourselves at the table in the old dining-room. Momsen began his story without hesitation, though I noticed that he was vaguely disconcerted by the absence of the servants, for more than once his hand stole out toward the bell cord, as if to ring the bell in the servants' quarters. Beyond that, he was perfectly at his ease.

"The whole thing started in 1792, on the night of the seventeenth of February. One Henrik van Damm, then owner of this place, much the

same at that time as it is now, was fatally stabbed with a rapier while he was at table. He was stabbed in the back, so the story goes, and did not know who stabbed him. Nor would anyone tell him, for I understand he was cordially hated. He cursed all in the house on that day in the double breath that remained to him before he died. A great many versions of the curse got about, of course, but everyone seemed to agree that the curse would pass off only when the oldest of four generations of the murderer's descendants had been killed.

"That much sounds as if it might have happened, doesn't it?"

I nodded. It struck me then that I had read of the incident in some old history of New York, but at the moment I found it impossible to trace my source.

"What follows doesn't sound so plausible. It seems that everyone in that house on the seventeenth died within a year—quite naturally, however, I understand. It was thought somewhat unusual that all those people should die before the following February, but coincidence was not ruled out. Some people put the whole aftermath down to coincidence, but most of the natives candidly professed the belief that the deaths had occurred through the diabolism of the dead van Damm.

"After that, the place stood vacant for a good many years. In 1827 a well-to-do New Yorker took the place, remodeled it somewhat, and prepared to live in it. In the house this man found a packet of letters that proved conclusively that Milady van Damm's lover had killed the old man. It had been prearranged, and on the basis of the general hatred of old van Damm, it was carried out, without even a protest from his wife. At any rate, nothing remained to make anyone hesitate about living in the house. In 1828, on the first seventeenth of February that he was in the house, the new owner died. The doctors said that there had been some heart trouble, but it got around that there was a curious burnt mark on the man's breast. A year later the man's son and heir died in precisely the same way. Then the family decamped, and, of course, the curse and its history were bruited about once more. On the strength of the letters found, an addition was made to the curse—that those who lived in the house before the time of the curse had expired would inherit the curse and all its evil. But the real inheritors were to remain the oldest in each of the four successive generations of the murderer's line.

"At this point, too strong a coincidence to be disregarded enters into the story. You have been aware of my eccentricities, among them the peculiar and inexplicable dread that I undergo on the seventeenth of February."

I recollected that Momsen had once said something, and said as much. He went on.

"Well, the letters found in 1827 gave the name of the murderer as Moomsenn, which is not entirely like mine, but similar enough to be taken as an old form of my name. That fact in itself means nothing, of course, but when you add to that the knowledge of my grandfather's sudden death after the birth of his only son, my father, and my father's tragic accident on the night of my birth, the coincidence begins to take definite form. To top it off, I might add that we know absolutely nothing about our ancestry beyond my grandfather. It is entirely possible, you see, that the lover of Milady van Damm was a lineal ancestor of mine—my great-grandfather, most probably."

"Rot!" I exclaimed.

"In that case," he went on without hesitation, "he would have been the first of the inheritors, and I will be—the fourth!"

I ridiculed the suggestion, and he freely accepted the ridicule. He con-

sidered the chance remote, and had only mentioned it as such.

"But to go on with the story of the house," he said at last. "In 1872 it was again occupied. Since the region was saturated with the legends concerning the house, it was thought advisable to vacate it on the seventeenth of February. This was done regularly until 1877, when the head of the house excused the servants but stayed in the building himself, together with his family. He was found dead on the morning of the eighteenth. Doctors again said heart trouble, but no doctor could explain the burnt mark on the man's breast. After that, the house was faithfully vacated on successive seventeenths of February.

"Thus, in time, the legend got about that old Henrik van Damm returns on the night of February seventeenth to kill the head of the house. Psychic investigators say that the house is merely the abode of forces of evil, which manifest themselves on that particular night, and it is true that no one has ever seen a 'ghost' here. It is my opinion that all this is a vast coincidence; you and I are up here to prove that statement tonight—and I hope we'll do it!

"But there are several things that bother me, and one in particular. When I first got into this house something happened that I've never quite forgotten. In a moment when my mind was wandering, I got up one day from the table and walked into the wall as if to pass through a door. Later, when I looked over old plans of the house, I found that there had originally been a door in that place, but that it had been sealed over in 1827!"

I said nothing, for I frankly did not know how to take the story. It was considerably outside my ken. You can imagine the reaction of a staid business man in such a position.

"Well," I said at last, "I'm willing to face the ghost, if you are."

He nodded, and set about clearing the table.

WHAT happened after that I'm not certain. I know that Momsen and I sat and drank of his good liquor until both of us were feeling somewhat unnecessarily gay under the circumstances. It all started when Momsen got up from the table and went to the door. He stuck his head out into the hall; then came back to the table.

"I say," he said, "do you smell anything?"

"No," I answered, but even as I said it a faint whiff of smoke came to my nostrils.

"Sulfur, isn't it?" asked Momsen.

I agreed with him. "Got any in the house?" I asked.

"None. And nothing that would smell like that, I'm sure. It must come from outside. Just notice how the drapes of that window billow inward—where'd that wind come from so suddenly?"

Perhaps the liquors had made both of us rather hazy. The lights seemed suddenly dim. Momsen stood opposite me. His eyes were raised somewhat; they were fixed on the window opening on the terrace. I turned; there was nothing there, save the drapes being whipped to and fro by the wind. The atmosphere was heavy with the odor of some obnoxious drug that seemed to deaden us; a swirling fog seemed to fill the room. Momsen raised an arm suddenly and pointed.

"Look!" he screamed. "Look!"

But I could see nothing. The air was cold with a ghastly chill, and from a distance came the sound of feet running—it was as if they were coming toward us with the wind that had arisen from some eldritch source and was sweeping now through the old dining-room. Then there sounded far away a cry, rising and falling, demoniac, shrill, fraught with horror.

At the same moment Momsen's face twisted utterly. In the dim light that fell on him he looked grisly; the shadows of his face stood out like great black holes in his white skin.

"Look!" his voice whispered eerily. "Look!"

He flung out his arms as if to ward off something; then he fell flat on his face.

At once the eery disturbance was stopped. The rushing, whistling wind was gone; the drapes at the windows swayed gently. There were no sounds of running feet, nor weird cries from the sky. The lights became brighter.

For a moment I stood there, trying to recover myself. I remember that I reached for the decanter of liquor before I thought of Momsen. Then I ran to him. "The shock has been too much for him," I thought, and bent to pick him up.

His hand was cold as ice! It needed no expert to tell that he was dead. I turned him over on his back. His eyes were wide and staring—his face was a picture of abject terror. But it was his breast that attracted my immediate attention. His dinner coat and vest were virtually burned away, so that his breast lay exposed. Just below the breast-bone was a dark, brownish discoloration, as if a long-dead wound had burned itself to the surface. It looked for all the world as if the point of a rapier had come through from the back, leaving the flesh burned in this unholy manner.

"The—fourth—inheritor!" I murmured, half beside myself.

Even as I said it, there came a whirling breath of ice-cold air that struck me full in the face, passed and was gone. I turned. The long drapes at the window were shuddering, but above the horror of it all, I felt a vast brooding sense of peace!

A Short Weird-Scientific Story

The Depths of the Lens

By N. R. McFARLAND

1

(Excerpt from the notebook of Robert Jamson)

THE affair started when I was given a small specimen by a friend of mine, a student of geology, who had found it while searching for odd stones in a pile of river gravel. The small, globular, crystal-like rock had caught his eye, and he brought it to me, who, besides being a chemist of some note, have also delved rather deeply into geologic researches. At first glance the stone resembled nothing so much as a cheap glass marble, but on closer inspection, one found that it actually *glowed*, with a pale green light. And, while its outer shape was perfectly spherical, if one contemplated it for very long one saw things rather monstrous to one brought up on as much orthodox Euclidean geometry as I was. Tetrahedrons, and other polyhedrons mingled with decagons and other polygons. One figure seemed always to merge into another and disappear, giving way to others which were dissipated in the same way. The

sides of the plane figures and the edges of the solid ones were not straight, but curving, lines that wavered like lines of smoke, and then changed position. If I concentrate deeply on some other subject, however, this fancy can be thrown off, and the globe will seem almost normal again.

I am perfectly sure, knowing what I do of this stone, that it was never created on this earth. It may have been brought from the far reaches of interstellar space by a meteor, or—ridiculous thought in one who has alway pooh-poohed all such imaginative ideas—it may have been left in the river-bed by an expedition from a far world.

Be that is it may, I now use this globe as a lens for a new form of microscope I have invented, which stands before me as I write. Impelled by idle curiosity, I one day inserted it in the tube, and was surprized by the result. Perhaps because of the unusual geometrical figures within, or for some other equally peculiar reason, this lens not only magnifies greatly, but gives an examiner the effect of being *on* the glass slide, instead of above it. When I observe crystals of any sort through this lens, I seem to be beside towering and geometrically correct buildings, in orthorhombic, monoclinic, or any other of the myriad forms of crystals. A powdered chemical seen through it gives one the effect of being surrounded by immense boulders or rocks. During the course of some of these experiments, I tried a simple chemical trick, every part of the experiment being carried on under the lens. Through a medicine dropper I dropped the solution I had made up onto the slide, looking through the eyepiece at the same time. I felt that I had been transported to another world with that one look.

The ground under my feet was not earth, but a transparent composition which was hard and brilliant. I seemed to be directly in front of an immense yellow wave which was bearing straight down on me. It swept on, and engulfed me, forcing me to struggle for my life in the oily waves. Soon I noticed, to my surprize, that the level of the liquid was going down rapidly and a thick yellow scum was swirling and twisting in places on the surface. Here was a new danger, I thought. If I were not careful I should be drawn into one of those whirlpools of scum. But even while I was trying to evade them, they ceased to be scum, and even as I watched became vast, transparent, yellow edifices which grew larger each second, extending in all directions. I gasped in horror as the corner of a building grew straight toward me. If I did not move, this thing would crush me under millions of tons of transparent yellow stone. But I could not move a muscle, and like a coward closed my eyes to wait supinely for the end.

I can't describe the agonies I endured during the moment I waited with my eyes closed. When I opened them slowly, and looked up, I saw the familiar ceiling of my laboratory. With a laugh, I came to myself. What a fool I was! To be taken in like that through a mere microscope! Then I again bent my eye to the tube, and felt again that sensation of fear. The buildings still towered beside me, but—with what relief I realized that!—they had stopped growing. I closed my eyes again, and removed my eye from the tube. I recognized the buildings for what they were, and laughed again.

Since then I have again and again done the same experiment. I feel the greatest horror during the time I have the sensation of being on the slide, but by closing my eyes I am able to escape from it, and become myself again. Sometimes I seem barely to escape from the building in time, and have a terrible effort to close my eyes. Since that is the only way to escape, I have found out, I feel that if ever I am unable to close them, I

shall be crushed. I sometimes think that perhaps the globe brought an evil genie with it from whatever dark, far-flung star it came from, and that he is trying to imprison me until I am crushed on that glass slide. But that way lies madness. It is impossible, utterly. And yet, when I think of those moments of superb horror down there, I wonder.

Tonight I am tortured by doubts. I know my conjectures to be impossible, but nevertheless I shall try it, and make sure. I shall descend to the bottom again, and test out my thoughts. Then when the moment comes that the buildings grow toward me, I will *not* close my eyes, but I will keep them open, and show myself how absurd my fancies are.

I have a peculiar feeling, which reason also tells me is ridiculous, that I am not coming back from this trip to the slide. When I look through the microscope, it seems that I am really made smaller, and that I am projected down on the slide; though whether it is the slide or the lens I am sometimes unable to tell. I have the sensation of being on the slide, but at the same time I seem to be in the globe. Perhaps my body goes to the slide, made thousands of times smaller, of course, and my soul, in the form of a pink butterfly or something of that sort, to the lens. Well, aside with idle fancies and prepare for the test. I leave this notebook here on the laboratory table in the event that I am unable to come back from the depths of the lens. No one will believe this account, and there will be no way to prove it. If I should be crushed, my body would be so small that it could never be seen under the great bulk of a crystal—or building.

Well, I have the solution all mixed and in the dropper. Here goes!

2

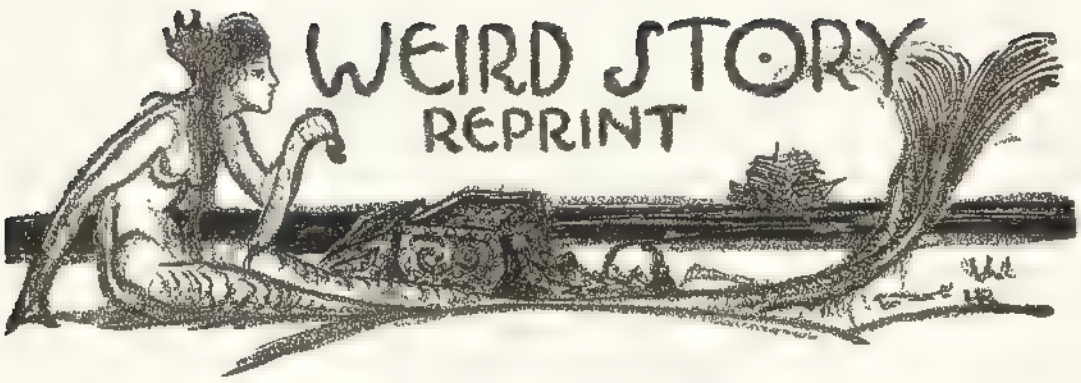
(Clipping from the Newville Banner, August 10, 1929.)

University Professor Disappears

NEWVILLE, August 10.—University officials and townspeople both are wondering about the mysterious disappearance of Dr. Robert Jamson, assistant professor of chemistry at the university here. The brilliant young doctor was last seen at ten o'clock last night, when the janitor of the building closed up for the evening. Dr. Jamson was engaged in research work at that time, and told the janitor that he would let himself out. Since then nothing has been seen of him. A possible explanation was suggested by a notebook left on his desk, but when examined, this proved to contain nothing but rather wild ramblings. One of the psychologists at the university, after examining the notebook, said that the disappearance furnished a remarkable example of the influence of fear, but further than that he would say nothing.

Another curious article on the table was a new form of microscope, believed to have been invented by Dr. Jamson, which had a peculiar globular lens, which seemed to glow with a pale green light. No explanation could be given of this, nor of the glass slide in the microscope. It was covered with orthorhombic crystals of sulfur, of the type formed in an elementary chemical experiment when sulfur is dissolved in carbon disulfid and allowed to crystallize out, which it does with great rapidity.

Police all over the state are on the lookout for Dr. Jamson, for whose disappearance university officials could give no motive. He was not known to have any love affairs, and his work was proceeding very satisfactorily. Laboratory assistants, however, said that he had grown increasingly moody during the last few days, ever since he was given a queer geologic specimen, which has been mentioned as the lens of the microscope.



*The Stranger from Kurdistan**

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

"YOU claim that demonolatry went out of existence at the end of the Middle Ages, that devil-worship is extinct? . . . No, I do not speak of the Yezidis of Kurdistan, who claim that the Evil One is as worthy of worship as God, since, by virtue of the duality of all things, good could not exist without its antithesis, evil; I speak rather of a devil-worship that exists today, in this Twentieth Century, in civilized, Christian Europe; secret, hidden, yet nevertheless quite real; a worship based upon a sacrilegious perversion of the ritual of the church. . . . How do I know? That is aside from the question; suffice it to say that I know that which I know."

SO HIGH was the tower of Semaxii that it seemed to caress the very stars; so deep-seated were its foundations that there was more of its great bulk beneath the ground than there was above. Bathed in moonlight was its crest; swathed in sevenfold veils of darkness was its ponderous base. Old as the pyramids was this great pile of granite which took its name from the ruined city, of equal antiquity, sprawled at its base.

A dark form approached, advancing swiftly through the gloom-drenched ruins, a darkness among the shadows, a phantom that moved with sinister certitude.

Suddenly the shadow halted, and its immobility became a part of the surrounding darkness. Other and lesser forms passed, slinking silently to the cavernous entrance of Semaxii, there vanishing in its obscure depths. And all were unaware of the form that had regarded them from its vantage-point.

A cloud parted. A ray of moonlight fought its way through the Cimmerian shadows, dissolving all save one, the darkest; and this darkest one it revealed as the tall form of a man wrapped in a black cape, and wearing a high silk hat.

Another rift in the clouds; more light, which now disclosed the features as well as the form of the shadowy stranger; haughty features with a nose like the beak of a bird of prey; the cold, pitiless eye of an Aztec idol; thin lips drooping in the shadow of a cynical smile; a man relentless and magnificent in defeat.

"The fools have all assembled to pay tribute to their folly; seventy-seven of them who will tonight adore their lord and master . . . and with

* From WEIRD TALES, July, 1925.

what rites? . . . It is long since I have witnessed . . ."

He paused in his reflections to count the strokes of a bell, whose sound crept softly across the wastelands.

"Little of my last night remains; however, let me waste it well."

So saying, he gathered his cape about him, and swiftly strode to the entrance of the tower.

"Halt!" snapped a voice from the gateway.

The ray of an electric torch bit the darkness and fell full upon the stranger's face.

"Halt, and give the sign."

"Who am I to give, or you to receive?" answered the stranger, as if intoning an incantation or reciting a fixed formula.

"Pass on."

And thus the stranger passed the outer guard of the shrine of demonolatry, the holy of holies where Satan received the homage of his vassals. Past the outer guard was the stranger, but far from the sanctuary wherein the Black Mass was celebrated, wherein the Lord of the World was worshipt with blasphemous rites.

A thousand steps of icy granite, winding in endless succession like the coils of a vast earthworm, led to the foundations of the tower. And at intervals, sheeted and hooded warders halted the stranger and demanded sign and password; and each in turn, as he received a sign, shrank and dropped his gaze before the hard, inscrutable eye of the stranger.

Down, down to the very basements of the earth; and then he found himself before a door guarded by two masked figures garbed in vermilion. Again there was an exchange of signs, after which the two vermilion figures bowed low as the door opened to admit him to the vaulted sanctuary where the Devil was that night to be invoked.

The stranger doffed his high hat, then, after a courtly bow to the assemblage, strode up the aisle and seated himself on one of the brazen stools that were placed, row after row, like the pews of a chapel. Once seated, he gazed about him, taking stock of his surroundings.

The black altar before him, with its crucifix bearing a hideously caricatured Christ, received but a passing glance; nor was any more attention accorded to the walls and vaulted ceiling whose grotesquely obscene carvings leered at him through the acrid, smoke-laden air like the distorted fancies of a perverted brain. Nor yet, apparently, did he note the acolyte who was trimming the black candles at the altar, nor did he seem to wonder that the floor beneath his feet was sprinkled with powdered saffron. It was the company itself that he studied, observing with interest the old roués and young sybarites, male and female, the seventy-seven who had assembled to adore Satan, their lord and master.

In the main, the seventy-seven were persons of wealth and distinction, who, having tried and found wanting every field of human endeavor and achievement, had sought thrills in the foulness and degradation of the mediæval rites of devil-worship; rakes whose jaded appetites sought satiation in the orgies that followed the celebration of the Black Mass; atheists who, deeming passive atheism an inadequate form of rebellion, found expression in a ritual whose sacrilege satisfied their iconoclastic desires.

Attendants bearing trays made their way among the seventy-seven, offering them glasses of wine and small amber-colored pastils. These last the worshipers either swallowed or else dissolved in their wine and drank.

THE stranger turned to the initiate who occupied the stool at his side.

"Tell me, brother, the nature of the rites to be celebrated here tonight."

The initiate eyed him narrowly as he sipped his wine.

"What do you mean?"

"Why," began the stranger blandly, "I am a foreigner, and I fancied that the ritual here may be different from what it is in my native land. I must confess," he continued, "that I am puzzled to see an altar and a crucifix in this shrine devoted to the worship of the Evil One."

The initiate stared at him in amazement.

"It must be a curious rite that you witnessed. Do you not know that we have a priest who celebrates the mass, and then——"

"A priest?" interrupted the stranger. "The mass? Why——"

"Surely; if not a priest, if not a mass, how could the arch-enemy become incarnate in the bread which we, the worshipers of Satan, defile and pollute as a tribute to our lord and master? Surely you must be a foreigner from some heathen land not to know that only an ordained priest of the church can cause the miracle of transubstantiation to take place. But tell me, who are you?"

"You would be amazed," replied the stranger, smiling enigmatically, "if you knew who I am."

Then, before the initiate could continue his queries, a gong sounded, thinly, rather as the hiss of a serpent than as the clang of bronze; a panel of the vault opened, admitting the vermilion-robed, misshapen bulk of the priest. Following him were nine acolytes, likewise robed in vermilion, and bearing censers fuming with an overpoweringly heavy incense. As they marched slowly down the aisle, they raised their voices in a shrill chant. The seventy-seven sank to their knees, heads bowed.

The high priest halted before the altar, bowed solemnly, then, with the customary gestures and phrases, went through the ritual of the mass, the kneeling acolytes making the responses in Latin. He then descended to the bottom step of the altar and began his invocation to Satan.

"Oriflamme of Iniquity, thou who guidest our steps and givest us strength to endure and courage to resist, receive our petitions and accept our praise; Lord of the World, hear the prayers of thy servants; Father of Pride, defend us against the hypocrisies of the favorites of God! Master, thy faithful servants implore thee to bless their iniquities which destroy soul and conscience alike; power, glory and riches they beg of thee, King of the Disinherited, Son who battles with the inexorable Father: all this we ask of thee, and more, Master of Deceptions, Rewarder of Crime, Lord of Luxurious Vice and Monumental Sin, Satan, thee whom we adore, just and logical god!"

The high priest rose, faced the altar and crucifix bearing its life-sized mockery of a caricatured Christ, and in shrill, malignant accents cried out his blasphemies: "And thou, thou in my office as priest I compel to descend into this host, to become incarnate in this bread, Jesus, filcher of homage, thief of affection! Harken! From the day that the virgin gave thee birth thou hast failed in thy promises; the ages have wept in awaiting thee, mute and fugitive god! Thou wert to redeem mankind, and thou hast failed; thou wert to appear in glory, and thou liest asleep; thou who wert to intercede for us with the Father, hast failed in thy mission, lest thy eternal slumber be disturbed! Thou hast forgotten the poor to whom thou hast preached! Thou who hast dared punish by virtue of unheard-of laws, we would hammer upon thy

nails, bear down upon thy crown of thorns, draw blood anew from thy dry wounds! And this we can do, and this we *will* do, in violating the repose of thy body, profaner of magnificent vice, glutton enamored of gluttony, accursed Nazarene, idle king, sluggish god!"

"Amen," came the hoarse response of the seventy-seven through the stifling, incense-laden air.

The priest, having once more ascended the altar steps, turned and with his left hand blessed the worshipers of Satan. Then, facing the Crucified One, in a solemn but mocking tone he pronounced, "*Hoc est enim corpus meum.*"

At these words the seventy-seven, crazed as much by the drugged wine and amber-hued pastils as by the sacrilegious madness of the ceremony, groveled upon the saffron-sprinkled floor, howling and moaning, overcome by a demoniac frenzy. The priest seized the consecrated bread, spat upon it, subjected it to unmentionable indignities, tore it to pieces which he offered to the worshipers of Satan, who crept forward to receive this mockery of a communion.

THE first of that mad group of devil-worshipers rose to his knees and was about to receive his portion when there came a startling interruption.

"Fools, cease this mockery!"

It was the stranger's voice, a voice whose arrogant note of command, ringing through that vaulted chapel like the clear, cold peal of destruction, silenced the frenzied devotees, so that not a breath was audible. The acolytes stood transfixed at the altar. The high priest alone retained command of himself; but even he was momentarily abashed, shrinking before the flaming, fierce eye of the stranger.

Yet the priest quickly recovered himself.

"Who are you," he snarled, "to interrupt the sacrifice?"

The seventy-seven, though still speechless, had recovered from the complete paralysis that their faculties had suffered. They saw the stranger confronting the high priest on the altar steps; they heard his voice, in reply, rich, sonorous, majestic:

"You, the high priest of Satan, and ask me who I am? I am Ahriman, whom the Persians feared; I am Malik Taûs, the white peacock whom men worship in far-off Kurdistan; I am Lucifer, the morning star; I am that Satan whom you invoked. Behold, I have returned in mortal form to meet and defy my adversary."

He pointed to the crucifix, then continued, "And a worthy adversary he is. Nor think that yonder simulacrum is the Christ I have sworn to overthrow. Fools! Besotted beasts, think you that it is serving me to deride a foe who has held me at bay these countless ages? Think you to serve me by this mummery? This very mass which you have celebrated, though in derision and in defiance of him, acknowledges his divinity; and though in mockery, you have nevertheless accepted him in taking this bread as his body. Is this serving me, your lord and master?"

"Impostor!" shrieked the high priest, his face distorted with rage; "impostor, you claim to be Satan?"

That high-pitched scream stirred the seventy-seven from their inertia, aroused them again to their frenzy. Gibbering and howling, they leapt to their feet and closed in on the stranger.

But at that instant a cloak of elemental fire, the red, blinding flame of a thousand suns, enshrouded Satan's form, and from it rang that same clear, cold voice, "Fools! Madmen! I disown and utterly deny you!"

ONCE again in the ruins at the foot of the Tower of Semaxii was the dark stranger, Satan as he had revealed himself to his followers. He seemed to be alone, yet he was speaking, as if with someone facing him.

"Nazarene," he said, "on that day wherein I challenged you to meet me with weapons and on ground of your own choosing to do battle for the empery of the world, I was foolish and knew not whereof I spoke."

He paused, lowered his eyes for a moment, as if to rest them from the strain of gazing at an awful and intolerable radiance, then continued: "You they crucified; me they would have torn in pieces, their Lord and master; both of us they have denied. I wonder whose folly is the greater, yours in seeking to redeem mankind, or mine in striving to make it my own."

And with these words Satan turned, his haughty head bowed, and turning, disappeared among the ruins.

A KING IN BABYLON

(Reprint)

By W. E. HENLEY

Or ever the knightly years were gone
With the old world to the grave,
I was a King in Babylon
And you were a Christian Slave.

I saw, I took, I cast you by,
I bent and broke your pride.
You loved me well, or I heard them lie,
But your longing was denied.
Surely I knew that bye and bye
You cursed your gods and died.

And a myriad suns have set and shone
Since then upon the grave
Decreed by the King in Babylon
To her that had been his slave.

The pride I trampled is now my scathe,
For it tramples me again.
The old resentment holds like death,
For you love, yet you refrain.
I break my heart on your hard unfaith,
And I break my heart in vain.

Yet not for an hour do I wish undone
That deed beyond the grave,
When I was a King in Babylon
And you were a Virgin Slave.

Are You Bashful?

NERVOUS? EMBARRASSED? SHY?

NO WONDER YOU ARE A "STAY-AT-HOME"

DO YOU ever feel embarrassed in the presence of strangers? Are you always bashful and confused when you meet people for the first time or when you are in company of the opposite sex?

ARE you missing all the good things and good times in life just because you are **BASHFUL** and **SHY**?

Girls and Boys, Men and Women who are timid, nervous, self-conscious and easily embarrassed never have much fun. How do you expect anybody to seek your acquaintance and companionship if you lack confidence in yourself? It is not always the good looking attractive men and women that are showered with all the attention.

To be popular—always in demand at parties, and affairs and social gatherings one must be a good mixer and possess a pleasant personality. Why should you sit at home, feeling blue and out of sorts—no place to go—nobody to see? Stop being bashful and embarrassed when you meet people for the first time or when you are in the company of the opposite sex.

You Are Self-Conscious!

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The Eyrie

(Continued from page 728)

Tell him if he could write another one like that, he would tie with Poe. Other fine torture tales in your magazine were *The Justice of the Czar* and *The Copper Bowl:* it is such stories that have made your magazine famous." [WEIRD TALES has not discontinued torture stories.—THE EDITOR.]

Miss Betty Bogschutz, of Philadelphia, writes to the Eyrie: "I wish to commend Seabury Quinn on his ability to write weird tales worthy of the name. I am a stenographer for a large corporation having a branch office in Philadelphia. My boss being away on business trips almost all day I have plenty of time to digest the story that I like best in your most excellent WEIRD TALES. I like *Trespassing Souls* by Seabury Quinn the best for this month, and *The White Wizard* deserves all the credit that can be heaped upon it, and also on its author, Sophie Wenzel Ellis. A more sympathetic story I have never read than *Warning Wings.* I hope it is a true story. Much praise to its author, Arlton Eadie. Here's hoping more GOOD stories by Mr. Quinn will be published, and I second the vote of Dick Thomas to publish more than one story by Mr. Quinn each month if possible."

"For more than two years I have had the pleasure of reading your magazine," writes M. T. Oakbough, of San Francisco. "Seabury Quinn's stories, Lovecraft's, Hamilton's, all are interesting and tend to make WEIRD TALES an unusual scientifically instructive magazine."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Your votes have given first place among the October issue stories to *Skull-Face,* by Robert E. Howard, with *The Silver Countess,* by Seabury Quinn, a close second in popularity.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE DECEMBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
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Children of Ubasti

(Continued from page 759)

nightrobe she wore the night she fled for life through the shattered window. She returned in a few moments, her pale, childish face suffused with blushes as she sought to cover the intimate attire by wrapping de Grandin's fur-lined overcoat more tightly about her slender form. Above the fleece-lined bedroom slippers she wore I caught a glimpse of an inch or so of slim, bare ankle, and mentally revolted against the Frenchman's penchant for realism which would send her virtually unclothed into the biting autumn night.

There was no time to voice my protest, however, for de Grandin followed close upon her heels, the contents of his parcels of the afternoon beneath his arms. "Behold, my friends," he ordered jubilantly, displaying four repeating shotguns, "are they not lovely? *Pardieu,* with these we shall be equipped for any emergency!"

The guns were twelve-gage models of the unsportsman-like "pump" variety, and the barrels had been cut off with a hack-saw close to the wood, shortening them by almost half their original length.

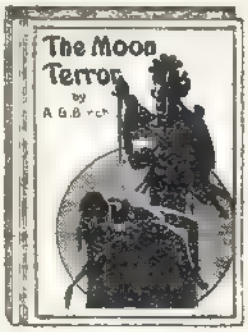
"What's th' armament for, sor?" inquired Costello, examining the weapon de Grandin handed him; "is it a riot we're goin' out to quell?"

The Frenchman's only answer was a grin as he handed guns to Arif Pasha and me, retaining the fourth weapon for himself. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* you will drive?" he asked.

Obediently, I slipped into a leather jacket similar to that worn by de Grandin and led the way to the garage. A minute later we were speeding toward Mooreston.

The Frenchman had evidently made a reconnaissance that afternoon, for he directed me unerringly to a large, graystone structure on the outskirts

NUMEROUS legends almost as old as the human race represent that the earth once had two moons. Have you ever heard of the Sect of Two Moons? They were the sorcerers of China and were the greatest scientists this world had ever produced. Talk of modern progress—our arts and sciences, our discoveries and inventions are child's play beside the accomplishments of this race of Chinese devils. Shut away in that remote interior—in a valley so little heard of that it is almost mythical—beyond trackless deserts and the loftiest mountains on the globe—this terrible sect of sorcerers has been growing in power for thousands of years, storing up secret energy that some day should inundate the world with horrors such as never had been known.



This novel narrates the sensational attempt of a group of Chinese scientists to obtain rulership of the world by a tremendous threat against the very existence of the earth. The diabolical methods by which they put their scheme into execution, the frantic race across the ocean to circumvent them, the weird and exciting adventures that befell, make one of the most gripping and fascinating novels ever written.

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of the town. On the north was a patch of dense second-growth pine through which the autumn wind soughed mournfully. To the east and west lay fallow fields, evidently reservations awaiting the surveyor's stake and the enthusiastic cultivation of glib-tongued real estate salesmen. The house itself fronted south on the Albemarle Pike, on the farther side of which lay the grove of oak and chestnut into which Trula had made her escape.

"Quiet, *pour l'amour d'un rat mort!*" de Grandin besought. "Stop the motor, Friend Trowbridge. *Attendez, mes braves. Alloñs au feu!*

"Now, my little lovely one!" With a courtesy which he might have shown in assisting a marchioness to shed her cloak, he lifted the overcoat from Trula Petersen's shivering shoulders, bent quickly and plucked the wool-lined slippers from her feet, then lifted her in his arms and bore her across the roadway intervening between us and the lawn, that the gravel might not bruise her unshod soles. "Quick, toward the house, *ma petite,*" he ordered. "Stagger, play the drunken one—cry aloud!"

The girl clung trembling to him a moment, but he shook her off and thrust her almost roughly toward the house.

There was no simulation in the terror she showed as she ran unsteadily across the frost-burnt lawn, nor was the deadly fear which sounded in her wailing, thin-edged cry a matter of acting. "Help, help — please help me!" she screamed.

"*Excellent; très excellent,*" de Grandin murmured from his covert behind a rhododendron bush. "Make ready, my friends, I damn think they come!"

As he spoke there came a momentary flash of light against the dark background of the house, as though a baleful, fiery eye had winked, and something a bare shade darker than the surrounding shadows of the night detached itself from the building and sped with pitiless quickness toward the tottering, half-swooning girl.

Trula saw it even as we did, and wheeled in her tracks with a shriek of sheer, mortal terror. "Save me, save me, it's he!" she cried wildly.

Half a dozen frenzied, flying steps she took, crashed blindly into a stunted cedar, and fell sprawling on the frosty grass.

A wild, triumphant yell, a noise half human, half bestial, came from the pursuer. With a single long leap he was on his quarry.

"*Parbleu, Monsieur le Démon,* we are well met!" de Grandin shouted, springing from his ambush and leveling his sawed-off shotgun.

The dim, leaping form seemed to pause in midair, to retrieve itself in the midst of its spring like a surprized cat. For an instant it turned its eyes on de Grandin, and they gleamed out in the night like the glowing orbs of an infuriated leopard. Next instant it sprang.

There was a sharp *click,* but no answering bellow of the gun. The cartridge had missed fire.

"*Secours,* Friend Trowbridge; *je suis perdu!*" the little Frenchman cried, going down under a very avalanche of flailing arms and legs. And as he fought off his assailant I saw the flare of gleaming, green eyes, the flash of cruel, white teeth, and heard the hoarse, beast-like growl of the thing that clawed and worried at his throat.

Nearer than the other two, I leaped to my friend's rescue, but as I moved, a second shadowy form seemed to materialize from nothingness beside me, a battle-cry of feline rage shrilled deafeningly in my ears, and a clawing, screaming fury launched itself upon me.

I felt the tough oiled leather of my wind-breaker rip to shreds beneath the flailing talons that struck at me, looked for an instant into a pair of

round, blazing phosphorescent eyes, then went down helpless under the furious assault.

"There is no power nor might nor majesty save in Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!" Arif Pasha chanted close beside me. "In the glorious name of Allah will I take refuge from Satan, the stoned, the rejected!" A charge of B. B. shot sufficient to have felled a bear tore through the clawing thing above me; there was a sharp snapping of metal, and a second blaze of searing light as the riot-gun roared again.

The ear-piercing scream of my assailant diminished to a growl, and the growl sank to a low, piteous moan as the form above me went limp, rolled from my chest and lay twitching on the frosted earth beside me.

I fought unsteadily to my knees and went sick and faint at the warm stickiness that smeared the front of my tattered jerkin. No need to tell a doctor the feel of blood: he learns it soon enough in his grisly trade.

Costello was battering, with the stock of his gun, at the infernal thing that clung at de Grandin's throat, for he dared not fire for fear of striking the struggling Frenchman.

"Thanks, good friend," the little fellow panted, wriggling from beneath his assailant and jumping nimbly to his feet. "Your help was very welcome, even though I had already slit his heart in two with this——" He held aloft the murderous, double-edged hunting-knife with which he had systematically slashed and stabbed his opponent from the moment they grappled.

"Good Lord o' Moses," Costello gasped as de Grandin's flashlight played on the two still, supine forms, "'tis Mr. and Mrs. Bear! Who'd 'a' thought swell folks like them would——"

"Folks, *parbleu*, my friend, I damnation think you call them out of their proper name!" de Grandin in-

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terrupted sharply. "Look at this, if you please, and this, also!"

Savagely he tore asunder the black-silk negligée in which the woman had been clothed, displaying her naked torso to his light. From clavicle to pubes the body was covered with coarse, yellowish hair, curled and kinky as a Bushman's wool, and where the breasts should have been there was scarcely any perceptible swelling. Instead, protruding through the woolly covering was a double row of mammillæ, inhuman as the dugs of a multiparous beast.

"For the suckling of her whelps, had she borne any, which God forbid," the Frenchman explained in a low voice. "*Regardez.*" He turned the shot-riddled body over. Like the front, the back was encased in yellowish, woolly hair, beginning just below the line of the scapulæ and extending well down the thighs.

A hasty examination of the male creature showed a similar coating, but in its case the hair was coarser and of an ugly dirty-gray tone, like the discolored patch upon the back of an elderly gorilla.

"You see?" he asked simply.

"No, I'm hanged if I do," I retorted as the others held silence. "These are terrible malformations, and their brains were probably as far from normal as their bodies, but——"

"*Dites!*" he interrupted. "Here is no abnormality, my friend. These creatures are true to form. Have I not already rehearsed their history? From the tumuli of Africa they come, for there men pursued them with gun and dog, like the savage beast-things they are. In this new land where their kind are unknown they assume the garb and manners of men. With razor or chemical depilatories they stripped the hair from off their arms and legs, and other places where it would have made them remarkable, and then they lived the life of members of the community—outwardly. Treasure from ravished tombs gave them much money; they were educated like human beings in the schools conducted by well-meaning but thick-headed American missionaries, and all was prepared for their invasion. America is tolerant—too tolerant—of foreigners. More than due allowance is made for their strangeness by those who wish to make them feel at home, and unsuspected, unmolested, these vile ones plied their dreadful trade of death among us. Had the female not let her appetite and bestial nature overcome her caution when she slew the young Calebson for his blood, they might have gone for years without the danger of suspicion. As it was"—he elevated his shoulders in an expressive shrug—"their inborn savageness and Jules de Grandin wrought their undoing.

"Come, our work is finished. Let us go."

TRULA PETERSEN, once more wrapped in de Grandin's greatcoat, wept softly against the little Frenchman's shoulder as we drove slowly homeward.

"Ah, my little brave one, you are cold, you tremble, you shiver," he sympathized. "Come, this will warm your frozen blood." From the pocket of the car door he produced a wide, flat flask of cognac and put it to her lips.

She took a swallow, gasped and choked. "Th—thank you, sir," she stammered when she had recovered her breath.

"*Parbleu,* it was an act of simple charity for which I deserve no thanks," he returned. "You have finished? you are through? you have had enough?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Sergeant, a drink? I know Friend Arif does not use it."

"Thank ye kindly, sor," the big

Irishman took a man's-sized pull at the bottle and returned it.

"*Très bien,*" said Jules de Grandin; "'twould be shame to us if we bore this back filled." And he proceeded to drain the big flask to the bottom.

The Gallows Tree

(Continued from page 766)

night into the death of Joseph Worth, 45, of New Jersey, U. S. A., whose body was found Sunday morning on the moor near the village of Polgarth.

Medical evidence tended to establish that Worth had evidently died of strangulation, which was borne out by a livid weal, such as might have been caused by a noose, encircling the man's throat. No trace of any such noose was found, however.

Mr. Roscarroll, the coroner, stated that suicide, under the circumstances, would have been impossible; and no motive for foul play could be assigned, as the deceased had no known enemies, and a considerable sum of money was found on his person. The jury returned a verdict of death from strangulation inflicted in a manner unknown.

Further mystery is added to the case by the fact that the late Mr. Worth had apparently left his room in the Polgarth Inn by a window which opens onto a balcony, as his door was locked on the inside. A loaded revolver was found on a table beside the bed, and two strong cords were tied, in a peculiar manner, to the posts at the foot of the bed. There was no evidence of any struggle, and apparently, the deceased had left the room of his own accord, although for an unknown motive.

Local antiquarians recall, as a singular coincidence, that centuries ago, a number of criminals were hanged from a gigantic oak, known colloquially as "The Gallows Tree," which then stood upon the exact spot where Mr. Worth's body was found, but which was cut down more than one hundred and fifty years ago.

The last person to meet death there was the highwayman known as Black Giles Trewartha, who was betrayed into the hands of the law by his brother Joseph in 1715. As he stood beneath the Gallows Tree, Trewartha imposed a curse upon his brother and on any of the latter's descendants who should ever tread Cornish soil.

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The Mystery of the Four Husbands

(Continued from page 741)

obstinate mind, which was clearly fighting against me now.

" ' "Since I asked Delphin to destroy it. That was a gift, sir, which you should never have made, not that I believe that he died of it, but because it would have been your fault if he had killed me with it. Was it the poison that was closed in the belly of a mahogany fetish covered with bizarre signs and curious designs burned into the wood?"

" ' "That was it, Olympe. There is no possible error. You know the tali-tali well."

" ' "Yes, Delphin used this poison and the barks of the tree which you brought him to make some experiments which interested me, much more than the rest of his work, as a matter of fact. His test-tubes and apparatus amused me in the beginning, but one tires of everything. I soon noticed, however, that Delphin was not well, and I blamed his languor on the bad air of the laboratory. I asked him to give up his work for a little while. He would not, so I asked him at least to do me the favor of destroying the tali-tali. He answered that there was nothing to fear because the tali-tali was only fatal to those who drank it and that he was certainly not crazy enough to drink the liquid, which he had already tried out on chickens and rabbits. He was amused at my childishness, but I gave him no peace until he had destroyed the tali-tali in front of me and Palmire. Tired of fighting with me about it he threw the fetish and the poison into the fire and it was burned up in a moment."

" ' "How did the poison act in the fire?"

" ' "First there was a long green flame like a sky-rocket and that was followed by a suffocating vapor which we ran from. As for the fetish itself, it was nothing more than an ember which flashed a last grimace before falling into ashes. That is all, sir, and I have nothing else to tell you, but if it was to hear this that you married me you might as well have dispensed with the ceremony. I would have given you the information just the same, and perhaps I would have loved you afterward. But now please leave this house and never let me see you again." '

"When Jacobini reached this point he stopped and rolled himself a cigarette.

" 'And then?' I asked.

" 'Then I left her to question Palmire. I forced her to tell of the tali-tali also. I attacked her from all sides. She's an ignorant peasant and she could not have invented the chemical effects which she had seen in the fire. All she said agreed to the letter with what Olympe had told me. I asked her all kinds of questions which Olympe could not have foreseen. I went on into other matters and at the end of my investigation I went back to Olympe and threw myself on my knees before her. She pardoned me, Zinzin, because besides being honest she is also very good.'

" 'Possible,' I said, 'but she is not proud!'

"As you can well imagine, I did not go to call on them, but I saw Jacobini eight days later. An awful anguish was visible on his pale, restless face.

" 'Zinzin,' he said to me in a hoarse voice, 'I think I'm infected with it, too. But perhaps it is only an idea. Yes, an idea! Even the thought of that tali-tali is enough to drive one mad.'

"I didn't have time to say a word. He had already gone and I was never to see him alive again.

"And this is the frightful trag-

edy which occurred the next day according to the police who with help from the dying Jacobini and Palmire's statements reconstructed the scene.

"At noon, Jacobini, who had not seen his wife since morning, went to the pavilion. He was filled with the darkest presentiments in spite of the fact that he tried to free himself of the idea of poison by trying to believe that his illness was due to swamp fevers which he had suffered from in the tropics.

"Luncheon was served there, and, as Jacobini entered, a door closed hurriedly at the end of the room. At the same time he heard furtive steps and the sound of a box being closed. He ran to the door, half opened it and saw Olympe engaged in low conversation with Palmire. She seemed very much troubled.

"At that moment a terrible cramp seized him in the intestines and he let the door close, having only strength enough to drop on the sofa. With one hand he had unconsciously taken hold of Olympe's work-box, which was badly closed and showed bits of fine linen. Jacobini's fingers, clutching at the lid feverishly from pain, opened it and fumbled in the lace. Suddenly they struck a hard object and he stood up, haggard and mad. . . .

"In his hand he held the fetish of death, the horrible phial, the hideous tali-tali which Olympe and Palmire had sworn was destroyed, burned before them. Olympe had lied. Olympe had poisoned him as she had poisoned the other two. He was to suffer the atrocious death which had tortured his predecessors.

"Overcoming the agony for a few minutes, Jacobini poured what was left of the poison into a bottle of wine on the table. There was enough left for a terrible dose, and then he waited for his wife.

"She was not long in coming. She kissed him and asked him how he felt

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this morning. He replied that he felt much better, but that the fever had not completely left him and that he was thirsty.

"'Then you must drink something, darling,' she said.

"He did not wait for her to pour the wine out and filled two glasses himself.

"'But you know that the doctors have forbidden me wine,' she said, 'and that I only drink water.'

"He insisted that she drink with him in the same glass, as they had often done. She turned her head away. He seized her brutally, threw her head back and savagely pinched her nostrils, thus forcing her to drink. As she cried with fear, he spoke. 'Perhaps you would have preferred another glass,' he said, and showed her the tali-tali.

"She cried for help, but suddenly put her hand to her abdomen and was taken with a horrible cramp. At the same time the pain clutched at him, and they fell together on the sofa. They shrieked together, agonized together, clutched and scratched and bit each other. They pulled at each other like wild beasts. They twisted and writhed, contorting themselves in the same hell.

"Jacobini had still strength enough to insult her, naming the first victims. 'You won't kill any more. You are going to die. You are going to die with me.'

"But the pain was too great. It seemed as though there was hell within him. He pulled weapons down from the walls, and he tried to stab himself with a knife and so end the horror at one blow; but he only succeeded in making a terrible wound. Then he turned the steel toward Olympe and slit her open from top to bottom like an animal. The room echoed with her last howl.

"Possessed by a thousand demons he smashed her skull, pierced her like a pin-cushion, pulled out her eyes and cut her into pieces. She was nothing

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for October 1, 1929.

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Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

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Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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WM. R. SPRENGER,
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Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of September, 1929. O. F. DAHLSTROM,
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My commission expires July 26, 1932.

more than a bleeding, nameless horror when the servants rushed into the room.

"But Jacobini did not die until the next morning and in his few moments of lucidity narrated the hideous details of their abominable martyrdom. The assistant district attorney who at one time had hoped to marry her was present, and he returned home and went to bed ill. During the night he was so delirious that they thought he would lose his mind and so add one more victim to the list."

ZINZIN stopped. Perspiration beaded his temples. He let out a sort of groan.

"The most horrible part," he went on, "is the fact that she had done nothing."

"Oh!" the others exclaimed.

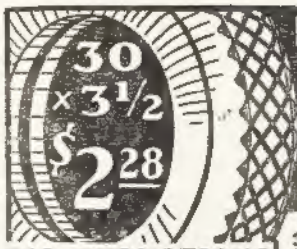
"Yes, she was innocent. I learned that the other day, only the other day."

"Palmire had done it all!" Gaubert exclaimed.

"As to her," said Zinzin with a terrible laugh, "the police took her and kept her. You can well understand that I did everything in my power to have her given full punishment. All she did was to say no, and to cry about Olympe. Concerning her mistress, however, she gave us explanations which dumfounded us. They were so utterly stupid or naive. For example, when they asked her: 'If your mistress was innocent, she would not have told her husband that the tali-tali had been destroyed before the two of you.'

"'Bah, that is simple,' Palmire answered. 'We agreed between us to say that it had been because there were already rumors about and we did not want to be suspected; besides we did not know what had become of the tali-tali because we really believed that Monsieur Delphin had burned it all the day that he threw a few drops in to please *Madame*.'

"Yes, she said just that," Zinzin



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went on, "and she was hissed and hooted. I cried louder than the rest."

"And what was she sentenced to?" asked Chaulieu.

"Death," replied Zinzin in a whisper.

"But they don't execute women?"

"No. . . . Her sentence was changed to life imprisonment. She died in her cell about ten years ago. I learned that the other day also."

"And did she repent? Did she confess?" Michel asked.

"No," Zinzin answered, looking at us like a madman, "and she had nothing to confess. . . . *She, too, was innocent!*"

"Good God!" Chaulieu exclaimed.

"But then, who was guilty?" Gaubert asked.

"A man who has just died and confessed on his death bed. After the tragedy he left the town and settled not far from here. Yes, he died the other day at Mourillon. That man had owned some property which touched the edge of Olympe's estate in the far corner where the pavilion was."

"But who was the man?—one of the twelve?"

"Yes, one of the twelve — the twelfth, to be exact! He naturally could not ever hope to marry Olympe, because of course she would never go through with eleven husbands after such deaths, but he eliminated those who had been happier than he . . . and at the end he had fixed it so that the evidence all pointed to Olympe.

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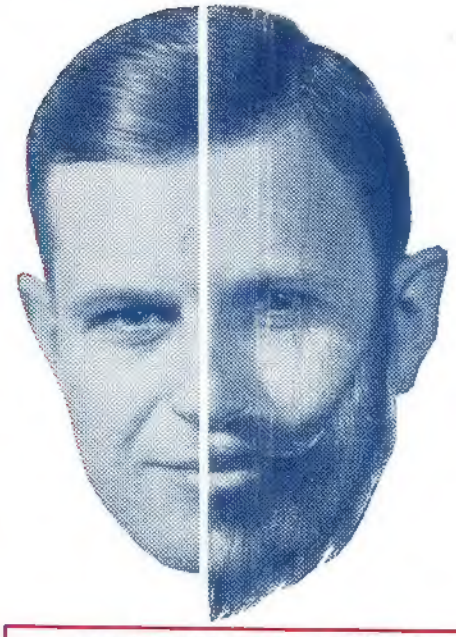

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